

Parshat Tzav
Our Sacred Sacrifices
Nomi Kaltmann - Class of 2023

Parshat Tzav features intricate descriptions of *korbanot* that were offered in the Temple. The rituals associated with each of these sacrifices are described in depth in this week's Torah portion.

When reading the *parsha* and imagining the experience of seeing fire burn an offering in the *Beit Hamikdash* or the image of a *kohen* standing in front of you as he perfectly aligned each part of the sacrifice, it is not hard to imagine how offering a *korban* could be a life changing experience. Each *korban* had such deep and rich symbolism built into its offering.

For example, the *kohanim* are commanded to keep the flame of the *Korban Olah* consistently burning.

זו אֶת־אֶהֱרֹן וְאֶת־בָּנָיו לֵאמֹר זֹאת תִּזְכֹּר הָעֹלָה הִוא הָעֹלָה עַל־מוֹקְדָה עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ כָּל־הַלַּיְלָה
עַד־הַבֹּקֶר וְאֵשׁ הַמִּזְבֵּחַ תִּשְׂקַד בּוֹ:

Command Aaron and his sons thus: This is the ritual of the burnt offering: The burnt offering itself shall remain where it is burned upon the altar all night until morning, while the fire on the altar is kept going on it. (Leviticus 6:2)

The Ramban says that the *kohanim* must place enough wood on the altar so that a fire is always burning, including throughout the night. In an era before electricity, when outside of the Temple it is likely there were very few sources of 24-hour light, it is not hard to imagine that this consistent burning light would have made a deep impression on anyone who walked past. This act symbolized eternity: it was meant to impart a message to the people of Israel, that while other things may be passing or temporary, the presence of God in the Temple is eternal.

In fact, the whole Temple experience was meant to emphasize this deep connection. The *Kohanim* are commanded to wear their special clothing while doing even mundane tasks related to the service of God, such as moving the ashes of previous *korbanot*.

וְלִבְשׁ הַכֹּהֵן מְדוּ בָד וּמְכַנְסֵי־בָד וְלִבְשׁ עַל־בִּשְׂרוֹ וְהָרִים אֶת־הַדָּשָׁן אֲשֶׁר תֹּאכַל הָאֵשׁ אֶת־הָעֹלָה
עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְשָׂמוּ אֶצְלַי הַמִּזְבֵּחַ:

The priest shall dress in linen raiment, with linen breeches next to his body; and he shall take up the ashes to which the fire has reduced the burnt offering on the altar and place them beside the altar. (Leviticus 6:3)

I don't know about you, but with my large brood of children, keeping everyone clean at the same time, especially when doing messy activities is a constant challenge. I cannot begin to fathom the care and precision of the *kohanim*, who, while wearing

holy vestments, were required to work with ash and still ensure that they stayed clean.

Rashi notes that due to the inherently dirty nature of the job of separating the ashes, when doing this role of cleaning, the *kohanim* were encouraged to change their clothing to other garments, some of them older and more worn priestly garments, in order to protect their newer ritual clothing from dirt. This method helped to avoid dirtying their clean and daily priestly clothing.

But on some level, surely it makes sense not to wear holy clothing while doing dirty work?

However, the symbolism of this act was clear: performing the service of God in the Temple requires special care. It's the reason we wear clothing to special occasions that differs from our daily work or play clothing. It's the reason that on Shabbat we wear beautiful clothes. Because our clothing helps to elevate the experience of the wearer, to make a separation between mundane and holy.

Throughout the Temple and all its associated rituals and work, the beauty was in the details. When one saw the *kohanim* dressed in their finest garb, or the beauty of the ritual in the *korbanot*, the Jewish people who would walk through would understand that this holy place was theirs for eternity. Through the good and the bad. Through the mundane and the dirty. But most of all, right there for them when they needed to connect with God.



Nomi Kaltmann is from Melbourne, Australia. She has a Bachelor of Laws and Bachelor of Liberal Arts in Politics and Jewish Civilizations from Monash University. In 2019, Nomi became the first Australian woman to enrol in the Yeshivat Maharat four-year Semikha program. She also holds a Masters degree in Legal Practice from the Australian National University.

Previously Nomi has worked for the Shadow Attorney General of Australia and for the Victorian Legislative Assembly. Nomi also coordinated and accompanied a Parliamentary delegation to Israel and the Palestinian Territories.

Nomi is one of the founding members of the Women's Orthodox Tefillah Group in Victoria. She is also the founder and inaugural president of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA) in Australia. Her work promoting gender equality for Australian women has been covered in major Australian newspapers including The Age, The Sydney Morning Herald, ABC Australia and The Australian Jewish News.

Nomi loves to write and is the Australian correspondent at Tablet Magazine. In addition to her regular pieces in Tablet Mag, Nomi's bylines have been published in The Forward, Religion and Politics, Neos Kosmos, Plus61J and Religion Unplugged. Nomi has completed several fellowships, including at Hillel International's Office of Innovation (OOI), Launchpad Australia, Va'Tichtov, Women Leading Locally, and the Orthodox Leadership Program for Women (OLP).