

When Moses Heard It He Was Satisfied

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Leviticus 16 is the morning *Torah* reading for Yom Kippur, and you have already heard a *d'rash* on it. I would like to add to the *d'rash* by showing you something God showed me, that is within the Scripture, but that is often missed.

For background, let's first look at Leviticus 10:1-5:

"But Nadav and Avihu, sons of Aharon, each took his censer, put fire in it, laid incense on it, and offered unauthorized fire before ADONAI, something he had not ordered them to do. At this, fire came forth from the presence of ADONAI and consumed them, so that they died in the presence of ADONAI. Moshe said to Aharon, "This is what ADONAI said: 'Through those who are near me I will be consecrated, and before all the people I will be glorified.'" Aharon kept silent. Moshe called Misha'el and Eltzafan, sons of 'Uzi'el Aharon's uncle, and told them, 'Come here, and carry your cousins away from in front of the sanctuary to a place outside the camp.' They approached and carried them in their tunics out of the camp, as Moshe had said."

So a terrible thing has befallen Aaron. Two of his sons, *Nadav* and *Avihu*, priests by virtue of their lineage, sinned against God, and God executed them by fire. I hope that no one here has ever lost a child but, whether or not any of us have, we can all imagine the grief it must have caused Aaron as a parent. And the fact that his sons died because they sinned against God made it all the worse.

Now our *Torah* portion, Leviticus 16:

"ADONAI spoke with Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons, when they tried to sacrifice before ADONAI and died; ADONAI said to Moshe, "Tell your brother Aharon not to come at just any time into the Holy Place beyond the curtain, in front of the ark-cover which is on the ark, so that he will not die; because I appear in the cloud over the ark-cover. Here is how Aharon is to enter the Holy Place: with a young bull as a sin offering and a ram as a burnt offering. He is to put on the holy linen tunic, have the linen shorts next to his bare flesh, have the linen sash wrapped around him, and be wearing the linen turban- they are the holy garments. He is to bathe his body in water and put them on. He is to take from the community of the people of Isra'el two male goats for a sin offering and one ram for a burnt offering. Aharon is to present the bull for the sin offering which is for himself and make atonement for himself and his household. He is to take the two goats and place them before ADONAI at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Then Aharon is to cast lots for the two goats, one lot for ADONAI and the other for 'Az'azel." (Leviticus 16:1-8).

Aaron's sons have just died in humiliating dishonor, and God, who took their life, is giving Aaron detailed procedural instructions, through Moses, on how to conduct the *Yom Kippur*

sacrifices, one of which is to offer a goat as a sin offering. If we look back at Leviticus 10, we see some of the same details:

"Moshe said to Aharon and to El'azar and Itamar, his remaining sons, "Take the grain offering left from the offerings for ADONAI made by fire, and eat it without leaven next to the altar, because it is especially holy. Eat it in a holy place, because it is your and your sons' share of the offerings for ADONAI made by fire; for this is what I have been ordered." (Leviticus 10:12-13).

Then Moses, being the good administrator that he was, followed up with Aaron, and discovered that El'azar and Itamar did not do what God had ordered. We read in verses 16-18:

"Then Moshe carefully investigated what had happened to the goat of the sin offering and discovered that it had been burned up. He became angry with El'azar and Itamar, the remaining sons of Aharon, and asked, "Why didn't you eat the sin offering in the area of the sanctuary, since it is especially holy? He gave it to you to take away the guilt of the community, to make atonement for them before ADONAI. Look! Its blood wasn't brought into the sanctuary! You should have eaten it there in the sanctuary, as I ordered." (Leviticus 10:16-18).

Aaron answered for his sons, and said to Moses:

"Even though they offered their sin offering and burnt offering today, things like these have happened to me! If I had eaten the sin offering today, would it have pleased ADONAI?" (Leviticus 10:19).

And then comes Moses' remarkable response in Leviticus 10:20:

"On hearing this reply, Moshe was satisfied."

Satisfied? How could Moses be satisfied when Aaron clearly did not follow God's instructions? And God's response was even more remarkable in that He did not respond at all! No fire from heaven – no destruction of Aaron and his two remaining sons – nothing! How can this be? God gave specific and detailed instructions for how to carry out the *Yom Kippur* sacrifice, Aaron and his sons didn't do it, when Moses heard Aaron's explanation he was satisfied, and we have to assume that God was also satisfied because he did not punish Aaron and his sons, and said nothing further about it!

I was perplexed by this, asked God to explain it to me, and I believe He did. A reality of our fallen world is that sometimes, obeying one *Torah* precept causes us to disobey another, and we have to make choices. Aaron and his remaining sons were in a state of mourning for their having just lost Nadav and Avihu, and their hearts were not, at that juncture, entirely right with the Lord. They knew that properly conducting the important *Yom Kippur* sin sacrifice was not just a mechanical act, but required a certain heart attitude that they knew they did not have at that moment. It posed a dilemma for them that they resolved by allowing the sin offering to burn up rather than eat it, and apparently both Moses and God thought they made a correct decision. The

reason I find this so intriguing is that I was taught that, in the Mosaic Covenant, literal obedience to the commandments of *Torah* was required, and that spiritual discernment was not available because the New Covenant had not yet come. I should not have been surprised, however, since I knew that both Moses and Aaron had had conversations with God previously, and communicating with God always involves the Holy Spirit.

I am calling this incident to your attention because it has helped me to understand and appreciate my ability and responsibility to discern through the Spirit today. I, like Aaron, El'azar and Itamar, am often faced with a dilemma of knowing how to apply some facet of *Torah* in this era when literally obeying many of the commandments of *Torah* is either impossible or inappropriate. Such an example is Leviticus 23:27, which is related to *Yom Kippur*:

"The tenth day of this seventh month is Yom-Kippur; you are to have a holy convocation, you are to deny yourselves, and you are to bring an offering made by fire to ADONAI."

You and I are complying with God's commandment today by having this holy convocation – this service. We are not doing ordinary work and we are denying ourselves by fasting from food. But we are not bringing an offering made by fire, which is part of the *Torah* instruction. Why not? We could construct a small wood-burning altar right here in front of the ark, but we are not doing it because the sacrifices and offerings commanded in the *Torah* were authorized in one place only – the Tabernacle, and later the Holy Temple. If we tried to literally comply with Leviticus 23:27 today, the result would be disobedience rather than obedience. Logical? Yes, but our assurance that we are correct is not because of logic; it is because the Spirit of God has spoken to us and given us discernment.

Well, that example was fairly simple, but there are others that are not so obvious. So, let's pick another one – compliance with *Shabbat* commandments in general. First, we'll review some of the Scriptures that apply; I'll read eight of them to you:

"Look, ADONAI has given you the Shabbat. This is why he is providing bread for two days on the sixth day. Each of you, stay where you are; no one is to leave his place on the seventh day.' So the people rested on the seventh day." (Exodus 16:29-30).

"Remember the day, Shabbat, to set it apart for God. You have six days to labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Shabbat for ADONAI your God. On it, you are not to do any kind of work- not you, your son or your daughter, not your male or female slave, not your livestock, and not the foreigner staying with you inside the gates to your property. For in six days, ADONAI made heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. This is why ADONAI blessed the day, Shabbat, and separated it for himself." (Exodus 20:8-11).

"Therefore you are to keep my Shabbat, because it is set apart for you. Everyone who treats it as ordinary must be put to death; for whoever does any work on it is to be cut off from his people." (Exodus 31:14).

"You are not to kindle a fire in any of your homes on Shabbat." (Exodus 35:3).

"Observe the day of Shabbat, to set it apart as holy, as ADONAI your God ordered you to do. You have six days to labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Shabbat for ADONAI your God. On it you are not to do any kind of work- not you, your son or your daughter, not your male or female slave, not your ox, your donkey or any of your other livestock, and not the foreigner staying with you inside the gates to your property- so that your male and female servants can rest just as you do. You are to remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and ADONAI your God brought you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore ADONAI your God has ordered you to keep the day of Shabbat." (Deuteronomy 5:12-15).

The one I am about to read, Isaiah 56:4-7, is particularly important because it is specifically addressing Gentiles:

"For here is what ADONAI says: 'As for the eunuchs who keep my Shabbats, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant: in my house, within my walls, I will give them power and a name greater than sons and daughters; I will give him an everlasting name that will not be cut off. And the foreigners who join themselves to ADONAI to serve him, to love the name of ADONAI, and to be his workers, all who keep Shabbat and do not profane it, and hold fast to my covenant, I will bring them to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples.'" (Isaiah 56:4-7).

Two more before we go on:

"A man there had a shriveled hand. Looking for a reason to accuse him of something, they asked him, 'Is healing permitted on Shabbat?' But he answered, 'If you have a sheep that falls in a pit on Shabbat, which of you won't take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore, what is permitted on Shabbat is to do good.'" (Mathew 12:7-12).

"Then he said to them, 'Shabbat was made for mankind, not mankind for Shabbat; So the Son of Man is Lord even of Shabbat.'" (Mark 2:27-28).

Okay, those are the Scriptures we are seeking to apply, so now let's compare our own *Shabbat* decisions to what these Scriptures say:

- Do we rest on *Shabbat*? What constitutes rest for us?
- Do we "stay where we are" on *Shabbat*? What constitutes staying "where we are?"
- Do we set *Shabbat* apart for God? If our answer is "yes," does that mean we never do anything ordinary on *Shabbat*?
- Do we cease from working on *Shabbat*? What kind of work is prohibited? Only the kind we ordinarily do? What about working on creative hobbies that give us pleasure? What about pulling the starter cord on a boat motor so we can go fishing? And what about fishing? Please, let's not go there!

- Do we require our children who live with us to also refrain from doing work? How about guests in our homes?
- Do we contemplate God's creation and the exodus from Egypt on every *Shabbat*? Is it okay if we think about other things? Do our minds ever go to thinking about what has to be done when we return to work? Is that kind of thought sinful?

I know I'm listing a lot of questions for just this one example of keeping the *Shabbat*, but it is an important example, so please permit me just a few more:

- Do we light our gas cooking stoves or fireplaces on *Shabbat*?
- Do we grill steaks in our backyards on *Shabbat*?
- Do we attend holy convocations on *Shabbat*? Well, we're here today, but do we always attend a service?
- Do we spend money on *Shabbat*? I cannot find a Scripture that prohibits it, so if our answer is "no," then why not? Don't some of us leave our tithes at Ohev on *Shabbat*? Aren't we occasionally asked to give freewill offerings on *Shabbat*? Haven't some of us registered late at conferences? Bought gasoline? Paid tolls getting to the conferences?
- Do we benefit from other people's work on *Shabbat*? Like use our cell phones? Turn on radios or TVs? Depend upon police and fire departments to protect us?
- Do we actively look for ways to do good on *Shabbat*? Is it really necessary to do good deeds, or are good deeds merely permitted as a *Shabbat* exception?

And finally,

- If we are Gentiles rather than Jews, does that or should that make a difference?

These are enough questions to get us thinking. There isn't a single step that we can take on *Shabbat* without being confronted by some of these questions and having to make decisions about them. And, if we compared our answers, we would find that we have not all answered the questions in the same way because, in the main, we are relying on our abilities to discern in the Spirit, and God is speaking to each of us individually.

If we lived in an Orthodox Jewish community and ascribed to Orthodox life, our community would be making these kinds of decisions for us. However, the New Covenant does not contemplate that most decisions on applying *Torah* should be communal. Instead, we are given the Holy Spirit who facilitates our communication with God so that we can ask God directly, and God's answer is not necessarily the same for all of us.

Is this confusing? Perhaps, but it's also wonderful. God gave Israel written instructions at a certain time in its history that we still make use of today, but we need God's help in applying *Torah* to our different and diverse circumstances. And we get God's help in the same way as Aaron and his sons did – by listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit who speaks within us and leads us. If we are not led by God's voice, we will continually be making mistakes on how to interpret and apply *Torah*. So let's continue to embrace the Holy Spirit for our answers, but realize that others who are doing the same thing may be hearing differently for themselves.

Today, *Yom Kippur*, is a day for reconciling relationships – our corporate relationship with God, and our individual relationship with God and with our fellow man, and we need the Holy Spirit's help to do it. It is a day for reviewing the past year, asking the Spirit to show us how we have fallen short, and asking Him how we can make things right. It is a day for considering how we have been keeping and applying the commandments of *Torah* and, in the example of Aaron and his sons, seeking the Holy Spirit for wisdom and direction when our available choices appear difficult. It is a day for asking the Holy Spirit to reveal our sins to us, convict us, and show us our way to repentance.

May God give us life and health in the coming year, with an even greater filling of the Holy Spirit.

B'shem Yeshua.