

Any Boy Scouts or Girls Scouts here?

Remind me: what was the motto of the Boy Scouts, and I believe the Girl Scouts, too?

Be prepared.

Now I don't know if the Boy Scouts were around before the Torah was given, but I think they totally got it right.

We face so many unexpected circumstances in our lives. Sometimes we know how to respond instinctively, but most of the time, the best thing we can do is try to prepare ourselves ahead of time. Sometimes we face a circumstance and we're not ready to meet it, and when we can, we might choose to defer it until we've had a chance to prepare. That is the Boy Scout – and, for that matter, Girl Scout, in each of us.

The Torah speaks in a variety of ways and places about preparation – like the three day preparation for receiving the Torah at Har Sinai, days which are only a few weeks away in the Jewish calendar. And, in a more expanded way, this whole count of sefirat ha-omer, mentioned in the parsha this morning, is construed by the Rabbis as a count up from our Exodus from Egypt to our receiving the Torah – seven whole weeks of readying ourselves.

But allow me to suggest that a most unlikely line in this week's parashah is one of the central places where the Torah invites us to see preparedness as a critical part of our Jewish and human identities.

**וַיִּקְרָא כֹהֵן:** (א) וַיְדַבֵּר יְקֹנֵק אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: (ב) דַּבֵּר אֶל אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל בָּנָיו וַיִּנְזְרוּ מִקֹּדְשֵׁי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא יְחַלְּלוּ אֶת שֵׁם קֹדֶשׁי אֲשֶׁר הֵם מִקֹּדְשִׁים לִי אֲנִי יְקֹנֵק:

*God spoke to Moshe, saying: "Speak to Aharon and his sons and they should restrict themselves (v'yinazru) from the sacred (offerings) of Israel which sanctify me, and not profane My Name – I am God." (Lev. 22:1-2)*

The verses here go on to describe that when the Kohanim became impure from a variety of causes, they should refrain from involvement with the holy stuff – the sacrifices – of Bnei Yisrael. Only after some period of waiting and purification could they reconnect to their basic task in service – to interact with those sacred sacrifices.

Two simple questions:

- 1) Why is this verse not in the conditional? Why does it say the priest has to refrain from the sacred things, period? Why not say right away, if and when you become impure, you have to restrict yourself,

etc.? What if the kohen evaded impurity? Is there an inherent value in this stepping back from engaging in the holy work?

- 2) Rashi, picking up on a midrash, comments here: אין נזירה אלא הפרשה. *This refraining is "hafrashah" – separation.* The close reader will appreciate a striking textual point here. Just last week, Rashi told us at the beginning of the parashah, that Kedoshim tihyu, be holy, mean העבירה ומן העריות ומן הפרושים תהיו מן העריות ומן העבירה – *be separate, parush, from illicit sexual encounters and from sins.* Last week kedushah itself meant separating, but now the kohen is instructed to separate from kodashim – from kedushah – from sacred things, themselves. How can we be told in one week to be holy and in the next week to separate from those very same holy things?

I think this is a central place where the Torah tries to communicate to us about preparedness. There are times of tumah, times of unfitness for holiness. In those times the mitzvah of separating from holiness is as great as the mitzvah of being holy itself. The importance of a life of holiness is matched only by the danger of approaching that holiness unprepared, at the wrong time, in the wrong state. This is one of the themes of this center book of the Torah, sefer Vayikra.

Perhaps Rashi uses the same work for kedushah and separating from kedushah exactly to send us this message.

The Torah Temimah articulates this idea most beautifully, commenting on our verses:

**תורה תמימה הערות ויקרא פרק כב הערה א:** פירש"י בפסוק זה, יפרשו מן הקדשים בימי טומאתם, עכ"ל. ונראה באור הענין בכונת הדרשה אין נזירה אלא הפרשה אע"פ דפשוט הוא כן, אך הכונה **שמלבד בימי טומאתם עוד יהיו נזהרים תמיד בקדושתם** ואל יהא הקדשים כחולין בעיניהם, אלא צריכין להיות מופרשים מהם, **ובכל עת יתבוננו אל נפשם אם לא נטמאו בדבר מה**, וכעין הדרשות דוהזרתם את בני"י דסוף פ' מצורע לענין פרישה מאשה סמוך לוסתה, ולענין ציון קברות, והכל משום סייג, וכן הכא נמי:

*"Beyond their days of impurity they always have to be cautious about their state of sanctity... at all times they should - we should - look inside ourselves to see if we have any kind of impurity..."*

Maybe this is why the commandment is presented in the Torah not as a conditional (if you become impure, separate from holy things), but as an absolute value: we are just not always ready to approach the holy, and we often need to set aside time to prepare. It is an absolute value, no matter how instinctively prepared we think we are. We must prepare for the holy. And let me be clear that when I say the holy, I don't mean just sacrifices, which we no longer have. And I don't just mean learning Torah or davening, although those are

things for which preparation is critical.

I mean every holy moment of our lives, in our interpersonal relationships, in our work lives, all can use a moment of preparation.

Let me suggest simply, and without being too specific, that it is the Rabbinic and more contemporary notion of *hakhanah*, of preparation, that we are describing here. Tefilot and minhagim of preparation are all around us:

- We have been singing the Hineni Mukhan Umzuman prayer before counting the Omer every night. I am ready, I am preparing myself. Real moments, if we use them well, of contemplation and preparation to enter the mitzvah with the right frame of mind.
- Remember how we begin the Amidah – ה' שפתי תפתח ופי יגיד תהלתך ("LORD, open my lips, and let my mouth speak your praises") – this is an act of preparation.
- Much of the notion of *muktzeh* on Shabbat actually surrounds whether we have prepared the objects around us for use on Shabbat. If we designated them, they are prepared – *mukhan*. If not, they are displaced from Shabbat – *muktzeh*. So the whole ancient notion of Shabbat was a day which required preparation of the things you want to use.

Beyond the explicit instances in Torah, preparedness is so central to our Jewish lives. Just last week at a conference, which to my surprise made the paper, I was speaking to participants about the idea that if you are visiting a shiva house of someone you don't know well, but you share a prayer community with, you should come prepared. Find out who the other relatives are and some of the circumstances and the tenor of the shiva house, in order to be a maximally supportive presence. This holds true in many other settings as well. Be prepared.

Please don't misunderstand. I am not saying that if you didn't meet up to a certain way of looking or acting or practicing that you should not come to shul, daven, learn, or do mitzvot. That is antithetical to our vision. Certainly in our Bayit we try to welcome people where they are, and we believe deeply in that message. But individuals, on their own, I think, are charged with this message in the Torah, to try to prepare for our encounters with the holy.

This is really where the Torah and the Boy Scouts converge. It would be great to be ever-ready for whatever we encounter in life, but if we don't take moments of preparation, to actualize the message of *v'yinazru*, of separating from the holy to prepare to encounter it, then something is missing. There is intrinsic value to the actions of preparing, of making ourselves ready for the holy in our lives every single day. So if my words

encourage you to take a few seconds before a prayer, a mitzvah, an encounter with a relative or friend or client, and engage in an act of hakhanah, of readying, whatever that looks like, then I think we will have heard the lesson of that hidden gem in this week's parashah.