

Can't Touch This!

In this week's Torah portion, *Tetzaveh* (Exodus 27:20- 30:10), we find the elaborate instructions for the special garments that are to be created for *Kohanim*, the priestly leaders of the sacrificial offerings. The purpose of these vestments is to help the priests acquire and maintain an absolute focus on the duties at hand.

Just as important as the vestments was the physical condition of the *Kohanim*. Even simple wounds and blemishes might disqualify a priest from leading the sacred rites (Leviticus 21:16-23). And before the *Kohanim* donned their priestly garments, they were to bathe and then immerse in a mikveh:

*⁴ Lead Aaron and his sons up to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and **wash them with water.***

⁵ Then take the vestments, and clothe Aaron with the tunic, the robe of the ephod, the ephod, and the breastpiece, and gird him with the decorated band of the ephod. ⁶ Put the headdress on his head, and place the holy diadem upon the headdress. ⁷ Take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him. ⁸ Then bring his sons forward; clothe them with tunics ⁹ and wind turbans upon them. And gird both Aaron and his sons with sashes. And so they shall have priesthood as their right for all time. (Exodus 29:4-9).

If they had encountered an impurity and did not properly wash, then they could not touch the priestly vestments or participate in the service.

Naturally, the ancient concern for priestly cleanliness is mirrored by the precautions we all are taking in light of the most recent Coronavirus health scare. While the mortality numbers for Coronavirus are still low in

comparison to the flu, the rapid spread of the illness and the severity of the symptoms prompt us to take extra caution. Note that the Center for Disease Control estimates that the flu sickened 42.9 million people during the 2018-2019 flu season, 647,000 people were hospitalized and 61,200 died. So far, there have been 93,000 recorded Coronavirus cases with more than 3,200 deaths attributed to the disease globally (11 deaths in the United States), while more than 50,000 have recovered.

Obviously, our concern should be to do whatever we can to avoid the flu as well as Coronavirus. And for both, as well as for a whole host of other illnesses, prevention is the best medicine! With this in mind, Temple Sinai sent out the latest instructions and precautions. To summarize:

- Frequent proper handwashing with soap and warm water. We are teaching handwashing techniques, as well as how to cough into our elbows.
- Daily cleaning and disinfecting of all surfaces and other items. Each classroom in the Temple Sinai school wing has Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment approved cleaner and disinfectant for use on all surfaces.
- Routine Environmental Cleaning: The Temple Sinai Facilities Team follows routine daily environmental cleaning with an increased focus on cleaning surfaces and high-use areas. We will also continue to follow the recommendations put forward by the CDC regarding cleaning to ensure a safe and healthy environment.
- Removing students from the classroom and sending them home when they are sick, including fever or when they just aren't themselves.

- **Changing the way we serve food.**
- **Discouraging people from shaking hands and giving hugs during services, classes and other gatherings.**

These last two items will be quite noticeable this Friday night and Shabbat morning at services. Specifically, we will be trying to avoid shaking hands and giving each other hugs. And we will have extra precautions in the way food is presented at the oneg.

Now, as you know, I enjoy greeting each and every one with a hand shake or a hug. But we are all better off safe than sorry. Perhaps tapping elbows? A very friendly wave? Whatever. Until this virus is under control, we are better off making like MC Hammer and singing, "Can't touch this!"

Shabbat Shalom!

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