

Parashat Tzav: Holding It Together

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Vayikra 6:5	
וְהָאֵשׁ עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ תִּקְדֹּד־בּוֹ לֹא תִכָּה וּבֹעֵר עָלֶיהָ הַכֹּהֵן עֹצִים בִּבְקֹר בִּבְקֹר וְעָרַךְ עָלֶיהָ הָעֹלָה וְהִקְטִיר עָלֶיהָ חֲלָבֵי הַשְּׁלָמִים:	The fire on the altar shall be kept burning, not to go out: every morning the priest shall feed wood to it, lay out the burnt offering on it, and turn into smoke the fat parts of the offerings of well-being.

1. Before and After Shimon Ha'Tzaddik

Toseftah Sotah 13:7	
כָּל זְמַן שֶׁהָיָה שִׁמְעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק קָיָם [הֵיטָה] גַּר מִעֶרֶב תִּדְרֹר מִשְׁמֵת הָלָכוּ וּמָצְאוּהוּ שֶׁכָּבָהּ מִכָּאן וְאֵלָּה מוֹצְאִין אוֹתָהּ פְּעָמִים כְּבָהּ פְּעָמִים [דּוֹלֵק]	So long as Simeon the Just was alive, the Western Lamp remained permanently lit. When he died, they went and found it extinguished. From that time onward, sometimes they found it extinguished and sometimes lit.
כָּל זְמַן שֶׁהָיָה שִׁמְעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק קָיָם הֵיטָה מַעֲרֵכָה תִּדְרֹרָה. כְּשֶׁמִּסְדְּרִין אוֹתָהּ בַּשְּׁחֲרִית הֵיטָה מִתְגַּבֶּרֶת וְהוֹלֵכוֹת כָּל הַיּוֹם כָּלֹּ וְהָיוּ מִקְרִיבִין עָלֶיהָ תְּמִידִין וּמוֹסָפִין וְנִסְכֵּיהֶן. וְלֹא הָיוּ מוֹסִיפִין עָלֶיהָ אֶלָּא שְׁנֵי גִזְרֵי עֲצִים עִם תְּמִיד שֶׁל בֵּין הָעֶרְבִים כְּדִי לִקְיָם מִצְוֹת [עֲצִים] שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (וַיִּקְרָא וְהָיָה). וּבֹעֵר עָלֶיהָ הַכֹּהֵן מִשְׁמֵת שִׁמְעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק תִּשָּׁשׁ כֹּחָהּ שֶׁל מַעֲרֵכָה כְּשֶׁמִּסְדְּרִין אוֹתָהּ [מִשְׁחֲרִית] לֹא הָיוּ נִמְנָעִין מִלְּהוֹסִיף עָלֶיהָ עֲצִים כָּל הַיּוֹם.	So long as Simeon the Just was alive, the altar fire was perpetual. When they arranged it in the morning, it would gain in intensity throughout the day, and they were able to offer the daily burnt-offerings and additional offerings, with their libations. And they did not add to it more than two loads of wood with the daily burnt-offering of twilight so as to fulfill the commandment of adding wood, as it is said: "The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it, it shall not go out; the priest shall burn wood on it every morning" [Leviticus 6:5]. After Simeon the Just died, the power of the altar fire diminished. For even after they had laid it out in the morning, they still needed to add wood to it all day long.
כָּלֹּ כָּל זְמַן שֶׁהָיָה שִׁמְעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק קָיָם בִּרְכָה נִכְנָסֶת בְּשֵׁתִי [הַלֶּחֶם] וּבְלֶחֶם הַפָּנִים שְׁתֵּי הַלֶּחֶם מִתְחַלֶּקֶת בְּעֶצֶרֶת לִכְהֲנִים וְלֶחֶם הַפָּנִים בְּרֶגֶל לְכָל הַמִּשְׁמְרוֹת [לְאֲנָשֵׁי מִשְׁמֶרֶת] יֵשׁ מֵהֶן שְׂאֵכְלִין וְשׁוֹבְעִין וְיֵשׁ שְׂאֵכְלִין וּמוֹתִירִין וְלֹא עָלָה בְּיָד כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד אֶלָּא כְּזֵית. מִשְׁמֵת שִׁמְעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק לֹא הֵיטָה בִּרְכָה נִכְנָסֶת לֹא בְּשֵׁתִי הַלֶּחֶם וְלֹא בְּלֶחֶם הַפָּנִים הַצְנוּעִין מִשְׁכֵּן יְדִיהֶן וְהַגְרָגְרִין חֲלָקוֹן בִּינֵיהֶם וְלֹא עָלָה בְּיָד כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד אֶלָּא כְּפֹל.	As long as Shimon the Just was alive, a blessing accompanied the two loaves [of the Omer] and the showbread. The two loaves were divided on Shavuot for the Kohanim, and the showbread on the Festival to all the men of the watch. And there were those of them who would eat and be satisfied, and there were those who would eat and leave some over, and only an olive's-bulk would come up into each of their hands. Once Shimon the Just died, a blessing no longer accompanied the two loaves or the showbread. The modest ones would withdraw their hands, and the gluttons would split it amongst themselves, yet only a bean's-bulk would come up into each of their hands.

¹ All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

<p>מַעֲשֵׂה בְכֹהֵן אֶחָד מִצִּיפּוֹרִי שֶׁנָּטַל חֶלֶק וְחָלַק חֵבֶרֶו וְאָעַפ"כּ לֹא עָלָה בְּיָדוֹ אֶלָּא כָפּוֹל וְהָיוּ קוֹרִין אוֹתוֹ בֶּן [חַמְצָן] עַד הַיּוֹם.</p>	<p>It so happened with one Kohen from Tzippori (Sepphoris) that he took his portion as well as his fellow's portion, and even though only a bean's bulk came up into his head, they would call him Ben Chamtzan ("Son of Violence"), until today.</p>
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<p>Rabbi Binyamin Lau, <i>The Sages Character, Context, & Creativity</i>, Volume 1, 32-33</p>	
<p>The Tosefta describes the twilight of a vanishing world. The Western lamp has begun to flicker, the power of the altar wood is steadily diminishing, and the two loaves have lost their vitality and are beginning to shrivel up. Nothing will be as it was.</p>	
<p>The allusion here is to the ascent of Greece and the intrusion of man into the kingdom of God. Divine power is being replaced by mortal power. Together, these descriptions convey a sense of the world that was, with the Temple at the heart of Jewish life, the ancient expression of the Divine Presence in Israel. The world in which prophecy disappeared was also the world that lost the Divine Presence and in which the connection between the people of Israel and their Father in heaven began to fade. Many sources place Simeon the Just at the center of all that was holy.</p>	

2. The World's Pillars

<p>Mishnah (Pirke) 1:2</p>	
<p>שִׁמְעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק הָיָה מִשְׁיָרֵי כְנֶסֶת הַגְּדוֹלָה. הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד, עַל הַתּוֹרָה וְעַל הָעֲבוֹדָה וְעַל גְּמִילוּת חֶסֶדִּים:</p>	<p>Shimon the Righteous was one of the last of the men of the great assembly. He used to say: the world stands upon three things: the Torah, the Temple service, and the practice of acts of piety.</p>

<p>Rabbi Binyamin Lau, <i>The Sages Character, Context, & Creativity</i>, Volume 1, 34</p>	
<p>Simeon the Just confronted the cultural torrents threatening to submerge the land of Israel. Like the Dutch boy who used his finger to prevent the flooding of the dam, he too attempted to forcefully maintain the old world: the Torah that he, together with the other men of the Great Assembly, had received from the prophets; the Temple service that connects Israel to their Father in heaven; and the acts of loving-kindness which liberate man from idolizing himself and compel him to acknowledge his true essence.</p>	

3. Holding It Together

<p>Robert Putnam, <i>Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community</i></p>	
<p>Light-touch government works more efficiently in the presence of social capital. Police close more cases when citizens monitor neighborhood comings and goings. Child welfare departments do a better job of "family preservation" when neighbors and relatives provide social support to troubled parents. Public schools teach better when parents volunteer in classrooms and ensure that kids do their homework. When community involvement is lacking, the burdens on government employees—bureaucrats, social workers, teachers, and so forth—are that much greater and success that much more elusive.</p>	

<p>Ted Miller, "Jensen Sticks as UW's 'Glue Guy,'" <i>Seattle Post-Intelligencer</i>, 10 February 2006</p>	
<p>Washington forward Mike Jensen is flexing his hand -- open and closed -- using it as a visual aid to explain his role with the Washington basketball team. Five fingers displayed by an open hand is bad. It stands for five individuals doing their own thing. The closed fist is good. It's symbolic of working together as a team. Only Jensen doesn't see himself as a finger, even when he clenches his fist tight to represent the cohesive whole of a starting lineup..."I'm kind of like the glue guy," he said...He's not the man behind the men; Jensen is the guy lingering subtly between them...</p>	