

D'var Torah
V'Yikra [Leviticus 6:1-8:36](#).
Tzav 5775

The Chain of Love
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The name of the current Hebrew month, Nissan, comes from the Hebrew word "*nes*", meaning "miracle", and Nissan is known as "the Month of Redemption", because of the miracle of our liberation.

But in an interesting and provocative twist, the same root, *nes*, is in the Hebrew word *nisah*, which means "tried" or "tested." Perhaps it is in moments that we are tested that there is the potential for miracle to occur.

So we could also say that Nissan is the month of our testing!
But what is the test for us?

The parasha we read today is Tzav, which means "command," and it is usually read just prior to Pesach. Tzav is also the root of the word Mitzvah. Hmm, perhaps the test has something to do with these commands....

And in this parashah, there are a certainly many commands for the kohanim to follow. First, there are instructions regarding mitzvah of *Terumat Hadeshen*; the removal of the ashes of the *Olah* – the daily offering. Then there is the command to keep the fire on the altar burning continuously. There are instructions regarding the morning and evening meal offerings, and other responsibilities of the kohanim. Later in the parashah, and in the verses that we will be reading, instructions for the elaborate rituals of the installation ceremony are set forth – for Moshe to follow in inducting Aaron and his sons into the priesthood.

This parashah also contains an anomaly, similar to the small *aleph* that we saw last week in Vayikra – the letter *mem* in the word *mokdah*, meaning "flame", is small. There are a number of beautiful teachings about this *mem*, but the one that I would like to touch on concerns the connections that the Rabbinic sages have made between this parashah and God commanding Abraham to sacrifice Yitzchak – the *Akedah* – and the commandment to maintain the flame of on the altar. For, if we read it without without this *mem*, the word becomes *ak'dah* – as in the *akedah*.

The word *Ha'Olah* is usually translated as a "burnt offering", but the word *olah* means "to lift" or "to elevate". With Yitzchak, Abraham was following the command to present his own son as an "elevated" offering to G-d. And we can certainly view that episode as a test – one which Abraham passes – it is evident that he has complete,

unwavering faith in Adonai. Miraculously, Yitzchak is saved, and Abraham is promised that he will be the father of a great nation, as numerous as the stars in heaven.

And now, here we are – *B'nei Yisrael*. We are that nation. And Moshe is our leader, guiding us out of slavery, into the wilderness where we will all grow and learn what it means to be free and what it means to claim our destiny.

There is a test in Tzav, one of 4 special “testing” moments in Torah, all of which are marked by a special trope, the *Shalsholet* – meaning the “chain”.

Three instances occur in Bereishit –

The first is when Lot is told to leave Sodom. He hesitates, he has become settled and is doing well in Sodom. But he makes the choice to listen to the angels, to remain true to his heritage and to leave. The second is when Eliezer, Abraham’s servant, hesitates in seeking out a wife for Yitzhak, wishing that it might be his own daughter to marry him instead. But Eliezer accepts that he has a duty to fulfill and he goes to the well to find Rivkah. Yosef is tempted by the beautiful Mrs. Potiphar. The consequence of his refusal could even mean death, and she is throwing herself at him. The shalsholet conveys his wavering on the word “refused,” but refuse he does, maintaining his ethics and his faith. In each of these moments, the shalsholet holds us in the momentary limbo of “What should I do?” – and more poignantly “Who am I?”

Each time the undulating melody of the shalsholet highlights the working through of an inner conflict. All three also relate to our choice to maintain our faith in God and our identity as Jews – ultimately accepting the responsibility of *l’dor v’dor* - from generation to generation. And the set up from these three earlier episodes helps us to understand the reason for the placement of this fourth and final shalsholet in Torah.

This test is Moshe’s and it occurs in Chapter 8, verse 23. Moshe is about to sacrifice his second ram, the “installation ram,” whose blood will anoint Aaron and his sons as kohanim. And the shalsholet sets the word “slaughter” apart.

Moses was a prophet and he could speak with God. But he was not the easiest person to deal with. He had a quick temper and had little patience for the work of maintaining family relationships.

Aaron, on the other hand, was a peacemaker. He was better able to impart Torah through loving words and his gentler approach. And acts of loving-kindness can be passed down from parent to child, from generation to generation; to speak loving words and to do loving deeds can be learned and bequeathed.

We can imagine that at the moment of slaughtering the ram meant for the installment of Aaron and his sons as priests, Moshe may have been awash in feelings, feelings of

loss and frustration, of jealousy, and apprehension. In this moment he must acknowledge that he is not destined to be priest, and that his own legacy feels tenuous. He is feeling the personal cost, the sacrifice of giving himself over entirely to God's will and the good of the Jewish people. When we hear the shalsholet, we hear the wavering of making a difficult decision, of listening to the voice within, and of coming to accept what we must do.

So what does this all have to do with Pesach? What is our test today?

We no longer have animal sacrifices. There is still a practice of setting aside an *olah* if we make our own challah.

But just before erev Pesach, we have the tradition of burning the chometz. The command to rid our homes – and ourselves – of chometz during Pesach is repeated no less than six times in Torah.

We burn the *chometz*...the yeasty puffed up part of ourselves – lifting it up as our *Olah* - and with this ritual removing any remaining barriers between ourselves and Adonai.

Our ego wafts up in a fragrant spiral, a shalsholet of smoke, and in that moment we claim our place as a link in an unbroken chain, stretching back to Abraham and forward into the future. Our test, as it has always been, is to keep the flame alive, *l'dor va'dor* – We must recall our deliverance, and pass on the story, loving kindness and the deep humility of gratitude. This is because of what Adonai did for me when I went out of Mitzrayim. And in rising to meet our destiny, opening the door for Elijah, may we invite in miracles