

Torah Portion Preview for Tzav

Shabbat beginning March 31, 2023

Tzav (“command”) adds to Vayikra details of burnt offerings, and those for meals, anointment, reparation, purgation, thanksgiving, free will, and wellbeing. It then specifies how to prepare oneself before butchering and eating certain animals. It ends with directions for anointing Aaron as priest.

The overlap between Vayikra and Tzav reminds us to look again. Are there more complex ways to understand how biblical instructions about sacrifice relate to our modern religious practice? Maimonides rejected symbolic interpretations, instead advocating developmental ones, arguing that God allowed Israel to continue sacrifices like their surrounding cultures, but limited the practices to the temple both to wean Israel from them and encourage a deeper understanding of the unity of God through prayer.

Our Reform movement goes further, rejecting all interest in restoring temple sacrifice as well as enriching our concept of prayer. Mark Washofsky, in *Jewish Living*, his definitive summary of Reform halachah, distinguishes Reform prayer as a balance between communal ritual with fixed times and liturgy (keva) and a personal, spontaneous, inward service of the heart (kavanah). Appropriately, he supports this Reform development through reference to our new siddur, which Rabbi Meeka is disclosing through her Sunday course “Siddur Mishkan T’filah: Unknown Treasures.”