

Mishnat Hashavua': Kelim 5:7

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How does one purify an oven?

How to purify an oven that had become impure? Divide it into three sections, and then scrape the inner lining down to the ground. Rabbi Meir says that it is unnecessary to scrape the lining, and not to the ground, but rather just to reduce it within by four hand breadths. Rabbi Shimon says, he must separate [the three sections]. If [the oven] is divided in two parts, one large and the other small, the large part remains impure, but the small part is pure. If [the oven] is divided in three parts, one that is larger than the other two combined, the large part is impure, and the small ones are pure.

תנור שנטמא, כיצד מטהרין אותו.
חולקו לשלשה, וגזר את הטפלה עד
שיהא בארץ. רבי מאיר אומר אינו צריך
לגזר את הטפלה, ולא עד שיהא
בארץ, אלא ממעטו מבפנים ארבעה
טפחים. רבי שמעון אומר, וצריך
להסיעו. חלקו לשנים, אחד גדול ואחד
קטן, הגדול טמא והקטן טהור. חלקו
לשלשה, אחד גדול בשנים, הגדול טמא,
ושנים הקטנים טהורין:

Comments

The final division of the Mishnah, Tohorot, deals with extremely arcane rules of ritual purity and impurity. The first and largest tractate, Kelim (utensils) examines the different levels of purity and impurity, how they affect various substances and are transmitted. When an earthen vessel is contaminated, the only way to purify it is to break it, so that it is no longer a functional vessel. Ovens in the Talmudic era were often made of stones set on the ground and coated with plaster inside. This Mishnah reviews how thoroughly the oven should be disassembled before being considered pure. If one section remained large enough to function as a separate oven, it apparently required further disassembly.

Questions

1. If we can treat this oven as a metaphor for moral purity, what does it teach about the stages necessary for purification?
2. This protocol for purification differs from that of kashering utensils, which are typically scoured and heated. What does the difference indicate about the separate concerns of purity and kashrut?

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Torah from JTS

Shabbat Hol Hamo'ed Sukkot

Exodus 33:12-34:26

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Parashah Commentary

This week's commentary was written by Rabbi Marc Wolf, assistant vice chancellor, JTS.

A number of weeks ago, David Foster Wallace, a favorite author of mine, tragically passed away. A visionary with words, his presence in American literature will be missed. A number of years ago, in a commencement speech to Kenyon College, Foster Wallace began his charge to the graduates with the following pithy parable:

There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, "Morning, boys. How's the water?" And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, "What the hell is water?"

His point was relatively simple: "the most obvious, important realities are often the ones that are hardest to see and talk about."

There is an almost organic progression from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur. However, when we get caught up in preparations for the holidays, we risk missing the intended effect. From Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur we work on deconstructing ourselves and our worlds. We stand together and seek to expose our inner selves, leaving us vulnerable and open. The language of Yom Kippur prepares us for this feeling—we are not atoning for our sins as we do at the beginning of Leviticus when the laws of sacrifice are first introduced, but on another level altogether. As we learn during our Torah reading, on Yom Kippur we atone from sin (Lev. 16:30). Through the day we literally achieve a level of purity—during the *S'lichot* and *Avodah* services we recite over

and over again the verse, "on this day we are purified." At the end of *Ne'ilah*, we are left spiritually lighter.

However, on the day after Yom Kippur, we walk around in a haze. We find it difficult to return to the mundane. But it is much more than a day of fasting and introspection that clouds our minds. With Sukkot, we reach the apex of the holiday season and the moment when the result of our process filters through the haze.

This is the time when we can let the impact of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur wash over us. It is then that we can begin to experience the joy that is the recurring theme of Sukkot.

During the holiday we encounter three distinct verses that relate the joy of Sukkot, each confirming the holiday, as we refer to it in our *'Amidah* as well as during kiddush, as *z'man simhateinu* (time of our joy). But what in particular is it about Sukkot that makes it a time of joy?

Isaiah Horowitz (1565-1630), a rabbi and mystic, shares a passage from the Mishnah, from the first chapter of Rosh Hashanah. The Mishnah states that there are four days on which different aspects of the world are judged: Passover for the harvest; Shavu'ot for the fruits; Rosh Hashanah for all who walk the earth; and Sukkot for water. Horowitz teaches through a midrash that this year of judgment, culminating with Sukkot, is the rationale for multiple verses of joy associated with this holiday. After the anxiety of judgment comes joy—but it cannot be truly manifest until all trials are over. The joy from surviving the preceding judgments compounds and at last can be expressed during Sukkot (Sh'lah Mas. Sukkot, 34).

For another view, Maimonides, in his laws concerning the lulav, shares that although all the holidays have a particular mitzvah of joy associated with them, Sukkot maintained a higher level of joy because of the special celebrations that occurred in the time of the Temple. Since, as we learned from the Mishnah, Sukkot is the judgment day for water, each morning of Sukkot a special water offering was made where the priests would pour water over the altar. Then, in a celebration during the holiday called Simhat Beit Hashoevah, the community would gather and dance, sing and rejoice (8:12). The Mishnah attests that the joy of this holiday is so remarkable that it goes so far as to say that if you had not seen the celebration of Simhat Beit Hashoevah, you have never truly experienced joy in your life (M Sukkah 5:1).

While each of these rabbinic reasons offers support for the mandate of joy during Sukkot, I believe that there is a much simpler reason for the joy of Sukkot. With Yom Kippur completed, the departure of the angst and anxiety intentionally cultivated by the liturgy and religious fervor during this season would elicit a sigh of relief from anyone. Simply making it through the Days of Awe is enough to create joy. With the brief respite of this week, we are now ready to simply enjoy life. Who can help but experience a feeling of joy?

But it may be a bit deeper than that as well. We take leave from the comforts of our lives on Sukkot. We spend our time eating and living in structures that at best are temporary—our roofs are insubstantial and our walls feeble. We intentionally remove the permanent structures from around us to draw

attention to what we are now more prepared to experience. After our days spent in awe, we can finally begin to appreciate the presence of God around us. We remove our material shelter and enter our spiritual sanctuary. This is the joy that surrounds us; the joy of the divine presence; the joy that David Foster Wallace would describe as "so real and essential, so hidden in plain sight all around us, all the time, that we have to keep reminding ourselves over and over: 'this is water.'"

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Taste of Torah Rabbi Matthew Berkowitz

The Torah commands that Israelites "sit" in sukkot or booths. The Talmud explains further

In the words, "you will sit in booths," [Lev. 23:42] *sit* means *dwell*. During the seven days of the festival, one is to make a sukkah an actual dwelling place. How? If one has beautiful vessels, one should bring them into the sukkah. If one has beautiful furniture, bring them into the sukkah. One should eat and drink, spend leisure time, and study in the sukkah. (*Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sukkah 28b*)

Why are we commanded to build these sukkot and transform them into our homes for seven days? And what lessons can we glean from their construction?

Once a year, we leave the comfortable surroundings of our own permanent homes, and dwell in sukkot that represent an openness to the elements and a sense of impermanence. Coming between the dry and rainy seasons of the land of Israel, the message of the sukkah is a powerful one—existentially and physically. We are between blessings and at a moment of great uncertainty. Although the harvest has been gathered, we await with great anticipation the rains that will bring life to both crops and humanity. Thus, it is not surprising that at this point of the year we are commanded to dwell in sukkot. We remind ourselves of the fragility of life and that ultimately, we are wholly dependent on the heavens above. Moreover, it is healthy to shake up one's self every so often. Changing places, even for only seven days, encourages us to think more broadly about the many blessings of life. It is an important lesson to take to heart, especially in the uncertain times in which we live.

I pray that this time in our lives, like the festival of Sukkot, be a time *between* blessings. May we have the gumption to leave our permanent homes, and dwell and rejoice in the fragility of the sukkah, and may we all have the experience of returning to our regular homes with a greater appreciation for ourselves, our family, and the world around us.

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