

613 Laws of Torah

Laws 400 - 449

(400)

None of the tribe of Levi shall take any share of the spoil (at the conquest of the Promised Land). “The priests, the Levites—all the tribe of Levi—shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel; they shall eat the offerings of Yahweh made by fire, and His portion. Therefore they shall have no inheritance among their brethren; Yahweh is their inheritance, as He said to them.”

(Deuteronomy 18:1-2) Because of what we saw in Mitzvah #398, Maimonides’ oversimplification of Yahweh’s instruction is wrong. Forty-eight cities in Canaan—“spoil,” by definition—were to be given to the Levites to live in. However, we have reason to believe (though we aren’t told in so many words) that the Levites were not part of the regular Israelite armies. The book of Numbers is full of census tallies. We read in Numbers 1:46-47 that “All who were numbered [that is, males ‘twenty years and older who were able to go to war’] were 603,560. But the Levites were not numbered among them by their father’s tribe...” But in Chapters 3 and 4, we see an excruciatingly detailed census of the tribe of Levi, broken down by family, listing what each family’s role was to be—things like dismantling and transporting the Tabernacle (Gershon) or taking care of the sacred furnishings such as the Ark of the Covenant (Kohath). Making war was not listed among their duties.

In light of what we’ve seen, it’s probably not too much of a stretch to suggest that those who are called into Yahweh’s service—and who faithfully serve Him and His people—should be exempted from “military service,” that is, earning a living in the workforce, in addition to their “Levitical” duties. “Don’t muzzle the ox that treads out the grain,” and all that. But I reiterate: the calling must be real, and the service must be in line with Yahweh’s direction. There are any number of “white-shoe preachers” today whose “ministries” are little more than bunko schemes. If you feel you have to beg God’s people for your support, then I’d question your status as a “neo-Levite.” In the Torah’s pattern, Yahweh’s provision for the Levites was arranged up front. It was not something to be extorted or wheedled out of the congregation. Being called as a “Levite” is the antithesis of donning the exalted mantle of the rabbi.

(401)

The kohanim shall serve in the Sanctuary in divisions, but on festivals, they all serve together. “Yahweh your God has chosen [Levi] out of all your tribes to stand to minister in the name of Yahweh, him and his sons forever. So if a Levite comes from any of your gates, from where he dwells among all Israel, and comes with all the desire of his mind to the place which Yahweh chooses, then he may serve in the name of Yahweh his God as all his brethren the Levites do, who stand there before Yahweh. They shall have equal portions to eat, besides what comes from the sale of his inheritance.” (Deuteronomy 18:5-8) Maimonides’ point comes not from the Torah, but from later tradition. David was the first to divide the priests into 24 courses, each of which officiated in the temple for one week, from Sabbath to Sabbath, twice a year. (As an interesting aside, it is these 24 courses that allow us to pin down the birth date of Yahshua the Messiah to the fall of 3 B.C.—almost surely on the Feast of Trumpets.) And every Jewish male was required to gather at the central place of worship (which David established at Jerusalem after centuries of moving about) three times a year—which included all of the “holy convocations”—the seven Feasts of Yahweh—except for the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement. So Maimonides has made a factual statement, but it’s not based on anything handed down by Moses.

The Deuteronomy passage, however, points out something we need to know about Levitical service. The calling (as we have seen) was Yahweh’s prerogative: He chose the entire tribe of Levi to minister before Him forever. But their service was strictly voluntary. If he “comes with all the desire of his mind to the place which Yahweh chooses,” then the privilege of service—of fulfilling the call Yahweh had made upon His life—was his to exercise. That’s a big “if.” And notice several other things: first, as we saw in the previous mitzvah, God—not the Levite—chooses the place or type of service. Of course, since He made us, He knows us. If we are in the center of His will, the desires of our hearts will be in perfect alignment with His.

Second, the “Levites” who desire to serve will see their needs met. They may not (no, let me rephrase that—they will not) get rich, but they will “have equal portions to eat.” It’s my experience that God provides resources in direct proportion to what we’re going to need to serve Him and His children. And as often as not, He provides these resources up front—before we think we need them. Case in point: as a young couple (a few centuries ago) my wife and I found ourselves in possession of a house that was far larger than we really needed for our little family. But over the next dozen years, we adopted nine more children. Yep, filled that big ’ol house right up. If God gives you a hammer, my friend, go looking for a nail. If He gives you a key, look for the lock it fits. And if He gives you a big satchel full of money, it’s a safe bet there’s something big and expensive on your spiritual horizon.

Holy Things

In this chapter, as in the last, we are going to see quite a few things required by Yahweh in the Torah that are impossible to do at the present time. They require a Sanctuary, a priesthood, and a functioning Levitical order, none of which exist today. And once again, we are forced to consider the ramifications of what this all means. There are several “possibilities.” (1) God is a cruel sadist who enjoys dangling the hope of our salvation just out of reach, so we can see it but not attain it. (2) He expects us to do the best we can with an absurd situation, like playing soccer without a ball or practicing archery without arrows. If this is the case, we’re deluding ourselves, for there’s no way to know if we’ve “scored,” or even how close we’re getting to the goal. Or (3—the only real possibility) the Torah was never intended to save anybody; there’s some other reason for it, some other purpose, some other function.

It is axiomatic that, since it was handed down by Yahweh Himself, the Torah’s real purpose has not become obsolete (as some Christians would have you believe). It is still worthy of our attention, even if we can’t literally do some of it anymore. For that matter, some of us were never told to do it. Time after time in the Pentateuch, we read the words, “Now Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel....’” There are millions of followers of Yahweh in the world today who are not biological descendants of Israel. As far as I know, I’m one of them. The Torah, the “instructions,” were given to Israel to perform—but not to the rest of us. Did God forget about us? No. We goyim were still part of the equation. We were to watch, learn, and benefit from Israel’s performance of the Torah. If the Law had been intended to be in itself the means to achieve salvation from our sins, then not only were the Jews in big trouble the minute they failed to keep it to perfection—and damned forever when they lost the temple—but worse, the rest of us never had a chance.

But that was never the purpose of the Law. Paul explained it to a group of gentile believers in the province of Galatia: “Until faith in Christ was shown to us as the way of becoming right with God, we were guarded by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so to speak, until we could put our faith in the coming Savior....” The Greek word for “guarded” (*phroueo*) works both ways: it can either mean “protected by a military guard to prevent hostile invasion,” or “to keep the inhabitants of a besieged city from flight.” This duality is the essence of holiness: keeping that which is outside—profane, corrupt, and evil—separated from that which is inside—pure, undefiled, and good, either by preventing the bad from entering, or by keeping the good from wandering off and getting lost. The Law did that for Israel (or at least it would have if they’d followed it) until the real means of salvation—Yahshua the Messiah—could fulfill His mission.

“Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian and teacher to lead us until Christ came. So now, through faith in Christ, we are made right with God. But now that faith in Christ has

come, we no longer need the law as our guardian.” That’s right. The Law is no longer needed as our guardian. But it shouldn’t be a total stranger, either. It is now our friend, companion, and counselor. “So you are all children of God through faith in Yehshua. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have been made like him.” That is to say, we, like Him, now have the Spirit of God residing within us—we are immersed in Him. “There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and now all the promises God gave to him belong to you.” (Galatians 3:23-29 NLT) Don’t take the ball and run with it here: Paul is speaking rhetorically. Of course there are still men and women, slaves and free men—and Jews and gentiles. But as far as the Torah is concerned (which is still the subject), Yahshua’s fulfillment of its prophetic requirements has made its role as guardian more or less obsolete. There’s not much point in rehearsing your lines after the play has closed.

I’m afraid the New Living Translation has rather overstepped its mandate here when it says, “You are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and now all the promises God gave to him belong to you.” The New King James, not so influenced by the myth of replacement theology, merely says, “If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” In the original Greek, there isn’t even a hint of Israel being replaced by the gentile church. In fact, the most oft-repeated prophecy in the Old Covenant scriptures is that of biological Israel’s eventual repentance and restoration. Paul is not denying that at all. He’s just saying that the promise (singular) that blessed Abraham and his heirs also includes the gentile Ekklesia, for we too are his heirs. We would do well to review that particular pledge: “I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12:2-3) That’s the promise the gentile believers share with Israel.

But I digress. Paul was explaining our freedom from the requirements of the Law: “Think of it this way. If a father dies and leaves great wealth for his young children, those children are not much better off than slaves until they grow up, even though they actually own everything their father had. They have to obey their guardians until they reach whatever age their father set....” The salient question is: what spiritual age have we attained? Paul’s point, as we shall see in a moment, is that positionally, we have already moved from slavery to freedom through Christ’s finished work. True enough, but few if any of us in this life reach the level of spiritual maturity that would allow us to honestly say, “My old guardian, the Torah, is of no further use to me. I am at one with the mind and will of Yahweh.” I submit to you that we would be unwise to throw out this baby with the bath water—to jettison the Torah simply because it has already been fulfilled

in Yahshua. Even though its authority as guardian no longer exists, it still has much to teach us, if only we'll listen. It's no longer our master. Now it's our mentor.

“And that’s the way it was with us before Christ came. We were slaves to the spiritual powers of this world. But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because you Gentiles have become his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, and now you can call God your dear Father. Now you are no longer a slave but God’s own child. And since you are his child, everything he has belongs to you.” (Galatians 4:1-7 NLT) Note that Yahshua made Himself “subject to the law.” Since the Torah reveals the mindset of God, only One who was “from” God could live His life in perfect harmony with it. Had Yahshua broken the least statute of the Law, He would have been rendered unworthy to “buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law.” Rather, His death would have been required for His own shortcomings. But because He was Immanuel—God with us—His sinless life and sacrificial death bought freedom for those who choose to be free, and adoption into the family of God for those who wish to belong to it.

There is no shortage of things that would enslave us—and did. “Before you Gentiles knew God, you were slaves to so-called gods that do not even exist. And now that you have found God (or should I say, now that God has found you), why do you want to go back again and become slaves once more to the weak and useless spiritual powers of this world?” The gentile Christians, having been freed from pagan practice, were being seduced by certain Jewish believers into a pointless and counterproductive reliance on the Law—something Paul characterizes as spiritually weak and useless—following its rules without understanding their significance. They were, in effect, following the shadow rather than the One casting it. “You are trying to find favor with God by what you do or don’t do on certain days or months or seasons or years. I fear for you. I am afraid that all my hard work for you was worth nothing. Dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to live as I do in freedom from these things, for I have become like you Gentiles were—free from the law.” (Galatians 4:8-12 NLT)

Does a child earn his parents’ love by doing what they say? No. He is loved because of the relationship that exists between them. Of course, parents are pleased when their children obey, but only because obedience brings safety, harmony, and tranquility to the family. Who wants danger, division, and strife? Paul now uses this dichotomy (natural love versus obedience) to explain the difference between living under grace and living under the Law. “Listen to me, you who want to live under the law. Do you know what the law really says?” The Galatian gentiles, having been given off-center instruction by the Judaizers, had some idea of what the Torah said. Paul’s question was meant to be rhetorical: “Yes, we think we do.” Not to be picky, Paul,

but the answer these days is no. Christians today don't have a clue "what the law really says," neither the literal precepts themselves nor the underlying symbolic truth that you're about to point out. "The Scriptures say that Abraham had two sons, one from his slave-wife and one from his freeborn wife. The son of the slave-wife was born in a human attempt to bring about the fulfillment of God's promise. But the son of the freeborn wife was born as God's own fulfillment of his promise. Now these two women serve as an illustration of God's two covenants...." The two "branches" of Abraham's family, Hagar's and Sarah's, represent two competing approaches to God's promise: law and grace.

But just when we're starting to get a handle on this, Paul throws in another metaphor or two. Or three. "Hagar, the slave-wife, represents Mount Sinai where people first became enslaved to the law. And now Jerusalem is just like Mount Sinai in Arabia, because she and her children live in slavery. But Sarah, the free woman, represents the heavenly Jerusalem. And she is our mother. That is what Isaiah meant when he prophesied, 'Rejoice, O childless woman! Break forth into loud and joyful song, even though you never gave birth to a child. For the woman who could bear no children now has more than all the other women!' And you, dear brothers and sisters, are children of the promise, just like Isaac. And we who are born of the Holy Spirit are persecuted by those who want us to keep the law, just as Isaac, the child of promise, was persecuted by Ishmael, the son of the slave-wife...." Oy! This is becoming quite a mental juggling act. But basically, Paul is just using several different symbols, like layers in a parfait, to compare freedom under grace with slavery under the Law:

Freedom: coming of age in Christ * Guardianship under the law
New Covenant under grace * Old Covenant under the Torah
Isaac, son of relationship * Ishmael, son of slavery
Promised one * Persecutor
Sarah, free and legal wife * Hagar, slave and illegal mate
God-ordained union * Human-devised scheme
Once barren, now blessed * Usurped blessing becomes a curse
Heaven, heavenly Jerusalem * Mt. Sinai, earthly Jerusalem
Holy Spirit * Spirit of submission

There is a bottom line to all of this, thank goodness: "But what do the Scriptures say about that? 'Get rid of the slave and her son, for the son of the slave woman will not share the family inheritance with the free woman's son.'" This disinheritance is in direct contrast to what we saw above, that those who are Christ's do share the inheritance. "So, dear brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, obligated to the law. We are children of the free woman, acceptable to God because of our faith. So Christ has really set us free. Now make sure that

you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law." (Galatians 4:21-31, 5:1 NLT)

The comparisons continue:

Remains in the place of blessing * Sent away into the wilderness

Inheritance secure * Cut off from inheritance

Acceptable to God through faith * Unacceptable and faithless

Constrained by grace * Obligated by Law

Free * Enslaved

At this late date, I find myself fighting a different battle from the one Paul fought. He was concerned about folks buying into the myth that says keeping the Mosaic Law is necessary for salvation—about trading the freedom that had been attained for us through Christ's atoning sacrifice for the code of conduct that was designed to keep Israel set apart from evil, pure and undefiled, until Yahweh was ready to bring His Messiah into the world through them. (The guys pushing that fable are still around, by the way, nibbling away at the fringes of the "Messianic movement.") I, on the other hand, am more concerned by the fact that Paul's admonitions have been hijacked by the vast majority of today's "Christians" and driven to a place he never intended.

The "church" today seems to think that the Torah has somehow been abrogated by grace and is therefore of no value. They think that the Old Testament is mere "Jewish stuff" that has no relevance in today's world. I would beg to differ. It is not irrelevant. It is not obsolete. Though its observance is not required for salvation (and never was) the Torah is still of inestimable value, for it reveals the very mind of God.

T'RUMAH, TITHES, AND TAXES

(402)

An uncircumcised person shall not eat of the t'rumah (heave offering) or other holy things. "And Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, 'This is the ordinance of the Passover: No foreigner shall eat it. But every man's servant who is bought for money, when you have circumcised him, then he may eat it. A sojourner and a hired servant shall not eat it.'" (Exodus 12:43-45); "No outsider shall eat the holy offering; one who dwells with the priest, or a hired servant, shall not eat the holy thing. But if the priest buys a person with his money, he may eat it; and one who is born in his house may eat his food." (Leviticus 22:10-11) Judaism 101 notes: "This rule is inferred from the law of the Paschal offering, by similarity of phrase, but it is not explicitly set forth in the Torah." You see a lot of that sort of thing going on in rabbinical writings: stating as "law" things that Yahweh didn't "explicitly set forth." The Exodus passage speaks specifically of the Passover sacrifice (see Mitzvah #112), while in Leviticus, the word "offering" is implied—it

literally says, “No stranger shall eat the holiness” (that is, that which is set apart), a phrase that would include the Passover sacrifice, the t’rumah, and a whole lot more.

The restrictions, however, seem to be consistent and significant. The offerings spoken of here were all things that had been sacrificed to Yahweh and were subsequently to be shared with, and enjoyed by, either God’s people in general or His priesthood. These offerings were “holy,” set apart for Yahweh’s glory. Therefore, they were not to be eaten by the “foreigner,” the outsider who had no relationship with the God of Israel, even though he may live in close proximity to Israelites and be on good terms with them. For the same reason, the “hired servant,” someone intimate with God’s people but whose only bond with them was financial, was not qualified to partake. But the “slave,” one who had been bought with a price, who had been circumcised according to the Law, was allowed to participate. If you’ll recall from Mitzvah #17, circumcision “signified that the barrier of sin that separated us from Yahweh had been removed, cut off, destroyed—a process that involved blood and pain, but one that made us available for God’s use.” It’s not too much of a stretch to view these “circumcised servants” as gentile believers.

So what is Yahweh trying to tell us here? First, remember that all of the sacrifices spoke, one way or another, of Yahshua the Messiah. (Rabbinical Judaism denies this, of course. Tracey Rich writes: “Were sacrifices a symbol of the savior to come? Not according to Judaism. That is a Christian teaching that has no basis in Jewish thought. Jews don’t believe in a savior, and don’t believe that sacrifice has anything to do with a savior or messiah.” Really? Think about it: if that were the case, the Torah they claim to revere would be pointless and cruel. Worse, it always has been, for nobody was ever able to keep it. If there’s no savior, and if they can’t—and don’t—keep the Law to perfection, the Jews are truly without hope. Why can’t they see that?) The Passover addressed the issue of innocent blood being shed so that we who trusted in its efficacy would live—a transparent metaphor for Yahshua’s crucifixion. Who, then, is able to benefit from these sacrifices? Not the stranger who merely rubs shoulders with God’s chosen. And not the outsider who does business with them, even if that business is mutually beneficial. No, it is only those who have a personal relationship with Yahweh, marked by the “permanent removal of their sin through a process involving blood and pain.”

(403)

Do not alter the order of separating the t’rumah and the tithes; the separation must be in the order first—fruits at the beginning, then the t’rumah, then the first tithe, and last the second tithe. “You shall not delay to offer the first of your ripe produce and your juices. The firstborn of your sons you shall give to Me. Likewise you shall do with your oxen and your sheep.” (Exodus

22:29-30) This is more rabbinical meddling with scripture. The order of giving and tithing is never specified in the Torah (except as implied for offerings associated with the seven feasts of Yahweh, which are tied to successive calendar dates). Since the rabbis under Akiba usurped the roles of the priests and Levites early in the second century, shifting the nation's authority to themselves, this is merely a thinly disguised ploy calculated to maximize the "take." Later in this chapter, we'll see all kinds of rules concerning the "second tithe." Sorry, Maimonides, it doesn't exist. The rabbis aren't confused, just greedy. I'll have more to say about this later. But speaking of procrastination, that's the real point of this mitzvah: don't. If something is due to Yahweh, don't delay its offering. Do it now.

(404)

Give half a shekel every year (to the Sanctuary for provision of the public sacrifices). "Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: 'When you take the census of the children of Israel for their number, then every man shall give a ransom for himself to Yahweh, when you number them, that there may be no plague among them when you number them. This is what everyone among those who are numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (a shekel is twenty gerahs)." This would make the half-shekel tax a little over two dollars—it's 0.182 troy ounces of silver. "The half-shekel shall be an offering to Yahweh. Everyone included among those who are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering to Yahweh. The rich shall not give more and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when you give an offering to Yahweh, to make atonement for yourselves. And you shall take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shall appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of meeting, that it may be a memorial for the children of Israel before Yahweh, to make atonement for yourselves." (Exodus 30:11-16) The census counted males twenty years old and above, in other words, those old enough for military service. Rabbinic greed notwithstanding, the census was not taken every year, but only periodically—quite rarely, actually. And at the risk of sounding nit-picky, the half-shekel was "an offering to Yahweh," not to the sanctuary, a fact stated four times in the passage. It is an atonement levy which is to be used for the service of the sanctuary. (The point is that Yahweh has no use for money, or any other sacrificial commodity: it's our obedience in faith that's valuable to Him. I suppose that's why the "dollar value" of the tax was so insignificant.)

It's worth going through the mental gymnastics of trying to figure out what "atonement" means in this context—after all, it's mentioned three times—four, if you include the related word "ransom." *Kapar*, translated "atonement" here, has the exact same consonant root as *koper*—ransom. (Remember, the Masoretic vowel pointing wasn't done until 2,500 years after these words were written.) The root means "pitch," as in, "to cover over something with pitch." From there, its

linguistic application jumps to “to cover, purge, make an atonement, make reconciliation, pacify, propitiate, or atone for sin.” (S) And how do we get “ransom” out of that? The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament explains: “From the meaning of k?per, ‘ransom,’ the meaning of k?par can be better understood. It means ‘to atone by offering a substitute.’ The great majority of the usages concern the priestly ritual of sprinkling of the sacrificial blood thus ‘making an atonement’ for the worshipper.... It seems clear that this word aptly illustrates the theology of reconciliation in the OT. The life of the sacrificial animal specifically symbolized by its blood was required in exchange for the life of the worshipper. Sacrifice of animals in OT theology was not merely an expression of thanks to the deity by a cattle raising people. It was the symbolic expression of innocent life given for guilty life.”

How does all of this shed light on the atoning-ransoming aspects of a half-shekel census tax? The key is substitution. It’s a lesson we see popping up dozens of ways in the Torah. Levites are substituted for first-born males; the scapegoat lives because he has been substituted by his buddy, the sin-offering goat, etc. In this case, Yahweh is emphasizing that Israel is His nation—all of it. They were purchased out of Egypt with shed blood. They have value in God’s eyes. So for each individual to pay a token “ransom” on the occasion of their numbering for battle is a national acknowledgment of Yahweh’s sovereignty—especially in the matter of doing battle with the world. No man is worth more than another. They are ransomed because they are God’s.

(405)

A kohein who is unclean shall not eat of the t’rumah. “Whatever man of the descendants of Aaron, who is a leper or has a discharge, shall not eat the holy offerings until he is clean.” (Leviticus 22:4) Maimonides is perfectly correct here. Of course, by the time he wrote, there had been no priesthood or t’rumah for a thousand years. (The t’rumah, you’ll recall, was the tithe the Levites paid to the Aaronic priesthood from the tithes they had received from the people of Israel.) Without an understanding of what the Levitical symbols mean, this mitzvah, like so many others, is a pointless waste of paper.

In the light of Yahshua’s finished work, however, God’s timeless truth emerges. A kohein, or Priest, is one who is called to intercede between men and Yahweh. Since the curtain separating the holy of holies from the world was torn in two at Christ’s crucifixion, all people—not just the sons of Aaron—are now potential priests. But in order to enjoy the benefits Yahweh has provided for them—seen here as eating of the t’rumah—these priests must be made clean. The cleansing process in the Torah involved washing in water, and this is precisely what we see in the New Covenant: “Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.” (Ephesians 5:25-26)

(406)

A person who is not a kohein or the wife or unmarried daughter of a kohein shall not eat of the t'rumah. "No outsider shall eat the holy offering; one who dwells with the priest, or a hired servant, shall not eat the holy thing. But if the priest buys a person with his money, he may eat it; and one who is born in his house may eat his food. If the priest's daughter is married to an outsider, she may not eat of the holy offerings. But if the priest's daughter is a widow or divorced, and has no child, and has returned to her father's house as in her youth, she may eat her father's food; but no outsider shall eat it." (Leviticus 22:10-13) This mitzvah is a continuation of what we covered in #402. At issue here is who (if anyone), within the priest's own household, would be prohibited from partaking in the bounty of the t'rumah. We've already established that an outsider may not participate. But the priest's wife is qualified, by virtue of her relationship with her husband. The priest's daughter may or may not, depending on her relationship. (A priest's son, in case you missed it, is by definition a priest himself.) It's fascinating to see the forgiveness of Yahweh here: even if the priest's daughter has made some poor choices in the past—even if she has been divorced from her husband (as long as there are no children from that union) she is welcomed back into her father's home as his child, still qualified to partake of the t'rumah with him. In other words, it's not about behavior. It's about relationships.

The Ephesians passage quoted in the previous mitzvah actually demonstrates this, though to keep things simple I extricated it from its context (for which I apologize). But the context confirms what we've just been talking about. It's the marriage relationship (as between the kohein and his wife), and how Yahshua's bride, the ekklesia—the called-out assembly of believers, has been cleansed and presented to Himself as spotless and undefiled. And because she has been cleansed, she may lawfully enjoy the benefits of the relationship. Beyond that, the passage may also shed some light on the disposition of children who die without reaching the level of maturity needed to choose or reject a personal relationship with Yahweh and His Messiah, Yahshua. The determining factor seems to be the attitude of the parents, and especially of the father. How's that for pressure, guys?

(407)

A sojourner with a kohein or his hired servant shall not eat of the t'rumah. "No outsider shall eat the holy offering; one who dwells with the priest, or a hired servant, shall not eat the holy thing." (Leviticus 22:10) Is there an echo in here? I thought we already covered this. Maimonides is making an artificial distinction between an "outsider" and a "sojourner." The word in Hebrew is zur, a verb meaning "to be a stranger, estranged, or alienated." The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament notes, "The basic thought is of non-acquaintance or non-relatedness." The

word can carry the connotation of deserting or abandoning an association or relationship, or going astray—being in a state of apostasy and rebellion. By application, it is even used to describe a prostitute, a woman who is “strange” to you. The point is that no one who is a stranger to Yahweh will benefit from His bountiful provision.

(408)

Do not eat *tevel* (something from which the *t'rumah* and *tithe* have not yet been separated). “They shall not profane the holy offerings of the children of Israel, which they offer to Yahweh.” (Leviticus 22:15) Although Maimonides’ *mitzvah* is probably wise counsel in general terms, the verse chosen as a proof text doesn’t support his thesis. To “profane” something (Hebrew *chahal*) is to defile, pollute, treat as common, or dishonor it. Though tithes were clearly a part of the structure of Israelite life (for reasons we’ve already discussed), Yahweh hates the litigious and unmerciful spirit that precipitated this kind of rule—one that would see a man’s family starve for lack of a precise accounting of every wheat stalk, mint leaf and cumin seed.

Yahshua put all of this in perspective. He told the religious leaders of the day, “How terrible it will be for you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest part of your income, but you ignore the important things of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but you should not leave undone the more important things. Blind guides! You strain your water so you won’t accidentally swallow a gnat; then you swallow a camel!” (Matthew 23:23-24 NLT) Tithing, He says, is right and good: we should be doing it. But justice, mercy, and faith are far more significant evidences of your “keeping of the law.” If these things are lacking, you have “profaned the holy offerings,” no matter how strictly you tithe.

(409)

Set apart the *tithe* of the produce (one tenth of the produce after taking out *t'rumah*) for the Levites. “And all the *tithe* of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is Yahweh’s. It is holy to Yahweh. (Leviticus 27:30) “The Levites shall perform the work of the tabernacle of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity; it shall be a statute forever, throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance. For the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer up as a heave offering to Yahweh, I have given to the Levites as an inheritance; therefore I have said to them, ‘Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.’” (Numbers 18:23-24) Let’s get one thing perfectly clear: the *tithe* is not primarily “for” the Levites—it is set apart to Yahweh, who assigns it to the Levites so they can “perform the work of the tabernacle.” As we noted in *Mitzvah #394*, though there is no tabernacle or temple today and no Levites performing service there, the principle still applies. To

recap: Levites were specifically set apart by Yahweh to do a service for God and man. In addition, they had been denied by their divine calling the capacity to earn a living in the normal way.

I'm thinking more in terms of the lady I know who was in Bolivia adopting a child a few years back, saw a dire need for a free medical clinic for the poor, and single-handedly, through prayer and persistence, made it happen. Or the friend of mine who heard the call of God on his life and now spends all his waking hours—and maybe a hundred grand a year out of his own pocket—shedding badly needed light on Yahweh's Word and the things that war against it. These two, and many like them, are to my mind the "Levites" of the church age, working for man's benefit and God's glory in the tabernacle we call earth.

It's worth mentioning, however, that the biological Levites and priests of Israel are not permanently extinct. They will once again fulfill their appointed roles in Yahshua's Millennial kingdom. Who are they? I have no idea, but their genealogical records are written in their DNA, and their future role is prophesied in scripture—most notably in the closing chapters of the book of Ezekiel.

(410)

Tithe cattle. "Concerning the tithe of the herd or the flock, of whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to Yahweh." (Leviticus 27:32) Every tenth clean animal born among the flocks and herds of Israel was to be set apart to Yahweh and therefore given to the tribe of Levi for their services. In this, they were just like the grain harvest, vintage, or fruits of the orchard. One tenth was set aside for Yahweh, and given to the Levites. In the matter of livestock, however, there was another factor. The firstborn—each animal that "opened the womb"—was already set apart to Yahweh, so it wouldn't count as being among the ten from which the tithe was drawn. In practical terms, this meant that far more than ten percent of the livestock would be dedicated to Yahweh. (Of course, we need to bear in mind that what was "given" to God was actually consumed by His people.) In observing the Torah in this matter, the Israelites were trusting God to bless their herds and make them fruitful. As usual, we find that Yahweh's math and ours don't match. For those who are willing to trust Him, His sums come out larger.

(411)

Do not sell the tithe of the herd. "Concerning the tithe of the herd or the flock, of whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to Yahweh. He shall not inquire whether it is good or bad, nor shall he exchange it; and if he exchanges it at all, then both it and the one exchanged for it shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed." (Leviticus 27:32-33) Maimonides has

missed the point entirely. It wasn't that you weren't allowed to sell an animal and present the money to the Levites instead. That was specifically allowed (see Deuteronomy 14:24-26). What we see here is a prohibition against the purposeful selection of one animal over another for the purpose of the tithe. Notice how it's worded: "whatever passes under the rod." The herdsman would notice that his cows or ewes had given birth in the fields. But the newborns wouldn't be counted until they reentered the fold, when they "passed under the rod." (This is the short stick he used to keep them in line, moving as he directed. The word for rod—shebet—is the same word used for a king's scepter. It speaks of authority, control, direction, even punishment. Compare Psalm 23:4 to Isaiah 30:31.) If the tenth lamb or calf was perfect and spotless, while the ninth had two heads and was covered with purple polka dots, it didn't matter. You couldn't substitute one for the other. The tenth one was taken for the tithe.

(412)

The Levites shall set apart a tenth of the tithes, which they had received from the Israelites, and give it to the kohanim. (This is called the t'rumah of the tithe.) "When you take from the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them as your inheritance, then you shall offer up a heave offering of it to Yahweh, a tenth of the tithe. And your heave offering shall be reckoned to you as though it were the grain of the threshing floor and as the fullness of the winepress." (Numbers 18:26-27) We looked at this principle in Mitzvah #394. Remember, the priests were a subset of the Levites. A tenth of what was produced in Israel was set apart to Yahweh for the use of the tribe of Levi, which had been given no tribal lands of its own. One tenth of that tithe was set aside for the priests, the Levite family of the sons of Aaron. This one percent was lifted up ("waved" or "heaved") in symbolic recognition that it was dedicated to Yahweh. The tithes received by the Levites were taken from the increase Yahweh had provided in livestock and crops. But since the Levites had no tribal land upon which to pasture flocks and grow grain, their tithe to the priests, the t'rumah, didn't actually represent any further increase. Yahweh, however, is telling them to count what they've received from the other tribes as if they had grown or raised the bounty themselves, and tithe from it accordingly.

(413)

Do not eat the second tithe of cereals outside Jerusalem. "You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or your new wine or your oil, of the firstborn of your herd or your flock, of any of your offerings which you vow, of your freewill offerings, or of the heave offering of your hand. But you must eat them before Yahweh your God in the place which Yahweh your God chooses, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, and the Levite who is within your gates; and you shall rejoice before Yahweh your God in all to

which you put your hands.” (Deuteronomy 12:17-18) The next three mitzvot are describing exactly the same principle; Maimonides has broken them down by the type of offering—grain, new wine, or olive oil (though he sort of skipped over livestock for some reason)—but they’re really all talking about the same thing. Note first that there’s no such thing as a “second tithe.” One might presume that this is another description of the t’rumah, the tithe of the tithe that the priests were to receive out of what had been tithed to the Levites in general, except for the fact that Maimonides listed them separately in Mitzvah #403 (where he called for this bogus “second tithe” to be paid after the t’rumah). Nowhere in the Torah is a “second tithe” mentioned or commanded. For that matter, it doesn’t even show up in the rabbinical literature before the time of Flavius Josephus—late in the first century A.D.

Thinking of this passage only in terms of tithing will throw you off immediately. Moses has given a short descriptive round-up of all the offerings Israel would contribute—not just tithes, but everything from vows to thank-, peace-, and sin-offerings, as well as sacrifices made at the feasts of Yahweh. The point here is that they were not to be offered up just anywhere. There would be a “place which Yahweh your God chooses,” where the tabernacle and Ark of the Covenant would be, a central location within Israel’s land where the people would gather for worship and celebration. Under the Judges, the tabernacle was at Shiloh. During Saul’s time it was located at Nob, and later at Gibeon. But its final stop was to be Jerusalem, the stronghold wrested from the Jebusites by David, whose son Solomon was given the privilege of replacing the tabernacle with a “permanent” temple.

All of the offerings were to be made here, all the tithes brought here, all the sacrifices to be slain here. Part of being holy—set apart to Yahweh—was that Israel would not be allowed to practice their rites without divine supervision. There was to be no do-it-yourself religion going on. Everything that even resembled a ritual was to be fraught with meaning and significance—and performed by God’s chosen priesthood, assisted by their brothers the Levites.

So all the sacrifices, tithes, and offerings were to be brought to the chosen place of worship to be consumed, a fact that made this place barbeque central—the location the whole country visited three times a year to party with God. But wait! The Levites were supposed to live on the tithes, but their homes were in cities scattered all over Israel. Does this mean that they couldn’t eat unless they came to Jerusalem (or Shiloh, or wherever the tabernacle was)? No, it doesn’t, but allow me to defer discussion of why to Mitzvah #417.

(414)

Do not consume the second tithe of the vintage outside of Jerusalem. “You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or your new wine....” (Deuteronomy 12:17) See the previous mitzvah, #413.

(415)

Do not consume the second tithe of the oil outside of Jerusalem. “You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or your new wine or your oil....” (Deuteronomy 12:17) Ditto.

(416)

Do not forsake the Levites. What is due them should be given to them, so that they might rejoice therewith on each and every festival. “Take heed to yourself that you do not forsake the Levite as long as you live in your land.” (Deuteronomy 12:19) This verse is the bottom-line conclusion to the whole discussion about taking the offerings to Jerusalem. God says, “Don’t forget about the Levites, for they are working for Me. I have blessed you in order that you may bless them in turn. If you forsake them, there’s not much point in Me letting you live in My Land any more, is there?” Or words to that effect.

(417)

Set apart the second tithe in the first, second, fourth and fifth years of the sabbatical cycle to be eaten by its owner in Jerusalem. “At the end of every third year you shall bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and store it up within your gates. And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that Yahweh your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.” (Deuteronomy 14:28-29) In Mitzvah #413, we learned that the tithes were supposed to be brought to Jerusalem (or wherever the tabernacle was at the time) in order to keep Israelite worship focused on Yahweh alone. But the Levites lived all over the place—48 cities within Israelite territory had been set aside for their use (see Mitzvah #398). Further complicating matters, here we see that the tithe was collected only rarely—at the end of every third year—and it apparently didn’t all go to Shiloh or Jerusalem, but was stored locally, “in your gates,” near to where it would be used by the Levites and the poor.

We see the same apparent contradiction in a parallel passage: “When you have finished laying aside all the tithe of your increase in the third year—the year of tithing—and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your gates and be filled, then you shall say before Yahweh your God: ‘I have removed the holy tithe from my house, and also have given them to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow,

according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed Your commandments, nor have I forgotten them.” (Deuteronomy 26:12-13) Here the Israelite is seen storing up his tithe, and at the end of the third year (specifically called the “year of tithing”) taking it out of his own house and distributing it to whom it belongs—right in his own community. So where does “You must eat them before Yahweh your God in the place which Yahweh your God chooses” (Deuteronomy 12:18) come in? The answer is in Deuteronomy 26:13: “Then you shall say before Yahweh your God....” Where was Yahweh?

Okay, He’s omnipresent, but for the purpose of the mitzvah, He was “in the place which Yahweh your God chooses,” that is, Shiloh, or Jerusalem—wherever the tabernacle/temple was. The tither, having stored the bulk of the produce locally, was to take a token of his tithe to Jerusalem and present it to Yahweh there, apparently partaking in a symbolic meal there, where he shared in his own tithe.

When was the “end of the year?” The Jewish year began in the spring, on the first day of Nisan, so it could have been just before this. But it makes more sense that the “end of the year” is meant to signify the last in the series of annual feasts of Yahweh, the Feast of Tabernacles, in the autumn, falling on the fifteenth day of Tishri. Every male in Israel was to come to “the place where Yahweh your God chooses” for this holiday anyway—it was a celebration that went on for an entire week (see Mitzvah #112). As far as God’s ritual prophetic calendar is concerned, it is the end of the year. And what better time to thankfully present your tithes to Yahweh than at harvest time—when you know how big the harvest was?

You’ll notice that the rabbis tie the “every third year” requirement to the sabbatical cycle, making the third and sixth years of each cycle “years of tithing.”

(418)

Set apart the second tithe in the third and sixth year of the sabbatical cycle for the poor. “At the end of every third year you shall bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and store it up within your gates. And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that Yahweh your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.” (Deuteronomy 14:28-29) In a sad but telling commentary, Judaism 101 notes: “Today, it must be separated out but need not be given to the poor.” I think Yahweh may beg to differ on that point. At any rate, this mitzvah points out that the Levites weren’t the only beneficiaries of the tithe. It was also used (under their supervision) to care for the widows, orphans, and exiles living in Israel. Yahweh is constantly seen reminding the Israelites that they were once strangers living in the land of Egypt, and to remember that fact through generosity to the poor and unfortunate

among them. It's remarkable that He chose to care for the disadvantaged through the disenfranchised, not the rich. The Levites had no inheritance of their own—by God's own design. It's a recipe for empathy. The challenges that come into our lives are there to help us help others.

And note once again that the "second tithe" is a man-made construct—it doesn't exist in the Torah.

(419)

Give the kohein the due portions of the carcass of cattle. "This shall be the priest's due from the people, from those who offer a sacrifice, whether it is bull or sheep: they shall give to the priest the shoulder, the cheeks, and the stomach."

(Deuteronomy 18:3) Oblivious to the real problem here, Judaism 101 notes, "According to the Talmud, this is not mandatory in the present outside of Israel, but it is permissible, and some observant people do so." This precept concerns sacrifices that were shared by the priests and the people—they could only be made at the tabernacle or temple. The problem today is that because Israel has turned its back on Yahweh, there are no priests. There is no temple. Sacrifices can't be made, and atonement can't be made for their sins as the Torah prescribes. "Observant" Jews are just going through the motions, not comprehending why. But most Jews see this sort of thing as completely pointless, so they drop any pretense of Torah observance.

But it's not pointless—at least, not if you understand the symbols. First, the priesthood is a metaphor for the Messiah—the One who stands as intercessor between God and man—and His people. Second, when the sacrificial animal was portioned out, what parts were allocated to the priests? The shoulder is indicative of the fact that the work of salvation was done by our High Priest, Yahshua. The cheeks (Hebrew *lachiy*: cheek, jaw, or jowl) seem to be symbolic of speech—the Word of God is an oft-repeated image of Christ. And the stomach reminds us that Yahweh provides our sustenance—without His blessings, we don't eat. Of course, if you've replaced God's law with your own, replaced His priests with self-appointed rabbis, and replaced the temple with the synagogue, you shouldn't be too surprised to find that you've also replaced a beautiful picture of God's grace and provision with utter pointlessness.

(420)

Give the first of the fleece to the Kohein. "The firstfruits of your grain and your new wine and your oil, and the first of the fleece of your sheep, you shall give him [i.e., the priest]. For Yahweh your God has chosen him out of all your tribes to stand to minister in the name of Yahweh, him

and his sons forever.” (Deuteronomy 18:4-5) Again, Maimonides’ mitzvah is impossible to keep because there is no priesthood in Israel. And substituting rabbis for priests doesn’t help his cause. It is only when you realize that the High Priest is ultimately Yahshua the Messiah that any of this makes a lick of sense. He is the One who “ministers in the name of Yahweh,” and we, his children, get to share in that privilege by virtue of our relationship with Him. Forever.

The firstfruits offering represents our faith in the future provision of Yahweh. It is given when the first harbingers of His bounty present themselves—in this case, the first fleece from the flocks of sheep. Whether acknowledging Yahweh’s provision before the harvest (as here) or afterward, note that we’re never asked to give something He hasn’t already provided. The timing is merely a question of whether we’re exercising faith or expressing thankfulness—neither of which makes any sense if your God isn’t real. As usual, the offering is made to Yahweh (as symbolized by the waving of the tithe toward the heavens—see Mitzvah #412), but it is utilized by the priests or Levites.

(421)

Set apart t’rumah g’dolah (the great heave-offering, that is, a small portion of the grain, wine and oil) for the Kohein. “The firstfruits of your grain and your new wine and your oil, and the first of the fleece of your sheep, you shall give him [i.e., the priest]. For Yahweh your God has chosen him out of all your tribes to stand to minister in the name of Yahweh, him and his sons forever.” (Deuteronomy 18:4-5) Supported by the same passage as the previous mitzvah, this one focuses on the grain, wine, and oil produced in Israel. The principles involved, though, are identical. (See Mitzvot #112 and #420 for the significance of Firstfruits.) The t’rumah is not associated with Firstfruits. Rather, it is the tenth of the tithe passed from the Levites to the priests, making the Talmud’s “t’rumah g’dolah” a bogus concept. The “heave-offering” associated with the t’rumah isn’t mentioned in this passage, though it is in the Leviticus 23:11 description of the Feast of Firstfruits. The point is that this passage is talking about Firstfruits offerings, not tithes. I may seem to be nitpicking, but there’s a good reason. If you don’t have a good foundation, you can’t build a proper house. The rabbis’ reconstruction of the Torah is nothing but a house of cards because it doesn’t rest on anything solid. Like the Word of Yahweh.

(422)

Do not expend the proceeds of the second tithe on anything but food and drink. “I have not eaten any of it when in mourning, nor have I removed any of it for an unclean use, nor given any of it for the dead. I have obeyed the voice of Yahweh my God, and have done according to all that You have commanded me. Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless

Your people Israel and the land which You have given us, just as You swore to our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey.” (Deuteronomy 26:14-15) In Mitzvah #417, we discussed how the Israelite was to distribute his tithes to (and through) the Levites in his own community at the end of every third year, and then go to Jerusalem (or wherever the sanctuary was at the time) with a sample of the tithe and “say before Yahweh your God” that you have done as the Torah instructed. This passage enumerates what they were to “say.” We’ll discuss “mourning” and “unclean use” in subsequent mitzvot. Maimonides’ injunction here stems from the view that anything not necessary for human sustenance falls within the phrase “given for the dead.” I believe it goes much deeper than that.

“Given” is the Hebrew *nathan*, meaning to bestow, grant, permit, give, ascribe, employ, devote, consecrate, dedicate, commit, or entrust, among other things. And “dead” is *mut*, a verb meaning to die, kill, perish, or be put to death. The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament says of *mut*, “This is a universally used Semitic root for dying and death.... The physical corruption of the human body and the consequent suffering and pain brought about by the Fall were only the obvious symptoms of death. Death is the consequence and the punishment of sin. It originated with sin. A grand theme of the OT is God’s holiness, which separates Him from all that is not in harmony with His character. Death, then, in the OT means ultimate separation from God due to sin.” Therefore, I’d say that the enigmatic phrase, “I have not...given any of it for the dead” really means “I haven’t devoted or employed any of what this tithe is a part of to a life leading to death—a life devoid of holiness to Yahweh.” How many of us could say that today? God’s point is clear: He’s not concerned with revenues—only relationships. He’s not interested in your money—He wants your life.

Notice that the Israelites were to conclude their “tithe statement” with a prayer. The tither was instructed to ask for Yahweh’s blessing in light of his obedience in this matter. One gets the feeling that if they had been able to honestly say what was required, God would have delighted in blessing them within the Promised Land through all their generations.

(423)

Do not eat the second tithe, even in Jerusalem, in a state of uncleanness, until the tithe has been redeemed. “I have not eaten any of it when in mourning, nor have I removed any of it for an unclean use....” (Deuteronomy 26:14) We are still discussing the presentation of the tithe in the place of central worship within Israel. (Not the second tithe, by the way. There’s only one.) The translation of *ba’ar* as “removed” is questionable (though possible). It’s more likely the meaning is “burnt,” as in a burnt offering. *Tame’* is a Hebrew adjective meaning unclean, defiled, ceremonially impure. As we’ve seen, there was no shortage of ways one could inadvertently

become temporarily unclean in a ritual sense under the Mosaic Law. One was not to partake of the sacrifices in a defiled state—he who did would be “cut off” from his people. The normal remedy involved washing with water and waiting until the sun had set—beginning the new day. This, of course, is prophetic of the cleansing we experience through Yahshua’s Spirit—the “washing of water by the Word” Paul wrote about in Ephesians 5. The point, for those living outside of theocratic Israel, is that our tithes and offerings are unacceptable if we who bring them are not ourselves clean. You can’t bribe God or buy your way into heaven. The tithe is an indicator of trust, not a down payment on eternal life.

(424)

Do not eat the second tithe when mourning. “I have not eaten any of it when in mourning, nor have I removed any of it for an unclean use....” (Deuteronomy 26:14) “Mourning” is another unfortunate translation. The word ‘awen really means evil, wickedness, iniquity—something morally corrupt and damaging to one’s relationship with God and man. It can also mean calamity, trouble, misfortune, or suffering. An “ish ‘awen” is a scoundrel, a villain—not a mourner. Again, we see that the tithe is not to be presented by one who is wicked or evil, unclean or defiled. It can only be brought by one whose sins have been atoned for by God’s perfect and acceptable sacrifice—the One predicted by the rites of the Torah.

(425)

Make the declaration when bringing the second tithe to the Sanctuary. “When you have finished laying aside all the tithe of your increase in the third year—the year of tithing—and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your gates and be filled, then you shall say before Yahweh your God: ‘I have removed the holy tithe from my house, and also have given them to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed Your commandments, nor have I forgotten them. I have not eaten any of it when in mourning, nor have I removed any of it for an unclean use, nor given any of it for the dead. I have obeyed the voice of Yahweh my God, and have done according to all that You have commanded me. Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the land which You have given us, just as You swore to our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey.” (Deuteronomy 26:12-15) We’ve been looking at this passage piecemeal for the past several mitzvot. Here it is all together in context. I just have one question: who could say all of this—or any of this—with a straight face? The unbending standard of righteousness required of anyone bringing a tithe into the house of Yahweh is impossible to meet in our own power. I mean, what kind of arrogance would it take to look God in the eye and say, “I have obeyed the voice of

Yahweh my God, and have done according to all that You have commanded me”? None of us have done that, no matter how much we wanted to. Without the imputed righteousness with which Yahweh has covered us through the sacrifice of His Messiah—the clean, white linen “garments of light” He alone provides—this would all be impossible.

Did Maimonides really think any of this out? Did he think he was off the hook because there was no more temple? Or did he think that we could get away with mindlessly chanting words we knew were lies just because ha-shem told him to—keep the letter of the law while quenching the Spirit in an ocean of self-delusion? I look at my own sins and tremble at the requirements of the law. I honestly don’t know what the Rambam was thinkin’.

THE TEMPLE, SANCTUARY, AND SACRED OBJECTS

(426)

Do not build an altar of hewn stone. “Then Yahweh said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. You shall not make anything to be with Me—gods of silver or gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves. An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you. And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it.” (Exodus 20:22-25) This is one of those places where not paying attention to the context will lead you completely astray. The altar being spoken of here is not the altar that was to stand outside the tabernacle of meeting—a portable affair to be made of bronze and acacia wood (see Exodus 27:1-8). Here in Exodus 20, Moses has just received the Ten Commandments, and Yahweh knows the Israelites are going to be in awe that their leader has been talking directly with God—they’re going to want to make sacrifices and peace offerings. And sure enough, we read about this very thing in Exodus 24:1-8.

What, then, is the significance of the instructions that Moses was given here? Yahweh begins with a quick reminder of the Second Commandment—the one that prohibits making images of anything for the purpose of worship. And then He uses the subject of altars to reinforce the Fourth

Commandment (keeping the Sabbath), that is, the thing we all-too-often miss about it: in the end, we are not to work for our salvation—we must take it as Yahweh provides it, or not at all.

Right now, you're probably scratching your head trying to figure out what I'm talking about. I'll admit, it isn't immediately obvious. Think about the concept of an altar for a moment. It was a place that was specifically set apart for worship. In that respect, an altar is not unlike a believer, for he too is set apart to honor Yahweh. There are two authorized options for making the altar (you might say there were two "alternatives"). You could use either earth (dirt, soil, or clay) or unhewn stones. Yahweh specified here that the materials used to build the altar were not to be "improved" by man in order to make them more worthy. They were to be utilized just the way God made them. The tip-off is the Hebrew word for "earth" or "soil." It's adamah, which is linguistically related to adam, or man—the one who was made from the adamah/earth in his unfallen state. We, then, as humans, do not have to be improved upon by man's effort to make us useful to God. We need only be dedicated to his purpose, set apart for His use. Religion is thus forbidden; relationship is encouraged.

(427)

Do not mount the altar by steps. "Nor shall you go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed on it." (Exodus 20:26) This seems self-explanatory, and its primary meaning certainly lines up with Yahweh's consistent sense of decency, modesty, and propriety. But in hindsight, there may be a secondary, underlying (and even more important) lesson. Pagan religions from Babel onward employed a system of initiation by degrees into the deeper mysteries of the cult. One would start with innocuous rites and rituals, quite harmless and innocent in themselves. But then, by small steps, the pagan worshipper would move toward a dark world that society would never have tolerated had they seen it blatantly presented. You'd start by attending some polite social functions at the temple of the local deity, but the next thing you know you'd find yourself burning infants alive in the arms of a red-hot statue of Molech. Today's Freemasons begin innocently with secret handshakes and funny hats, but by the time they've reached the thirty-first degree, they're offering blood-curdling secret oaths honoring false gods like Allah, Shiva, Osiris, and Lucifer himself. (See Future History, Chapter 14: "Mystery Babylon.")

I believe Yahweh is telling us that we aren't to approach Him by degrees. We can't. We're either His children, or we're not—there are no halfway believers, no novices or initiates. Like all children, we grow from infancy to maturity, but we are never only partially in Yahweh's family.

(428)

Build the Sanctuary. "Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." (Exodus 25:8)

Okay, let's see a show of hands: how many of you have ever built the sanctuary as prescribed in Exodus? You haven't? Then according to Maimonides, you're a lawbreaker, a heinous sinner, and your sin can only be atoned by a priest killing a goat on the Day of Atonement and sprinkling his blood on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant that sits in the sanctuary you didn't build. But wait a minute, you say: there are no priests, and the Ark has been lost for two and a half millennia. Gee, I guess you're in trouble. We're all in trouble.

We're in trouble, that is, if—as some insist—keeping the letter of the Torah is necessary for our redemption. We're in trouble if the rabbinical take on the law of Moses has any validity at all (which it doesn't). Here's what's really going on. The sanctuary was an exquisite and detailed picture of the Plan of God, centered on the coming Messiah. And now that His Spirit lives within us as believers, we are the temple, for we are the body of Christ: He has “built the sanctuary” in our lives. As Paul explained it to the Corinthians, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.” (I Corinthians 3:16-17) “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?” (I Corinthians 6:19) “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.... Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.” (I Corinthians 12:12, 27)

And although it's a foreign concept to Maimonides, let us not gloss over that final phrase: “... that I may dwell among them.” That was the whole point of the Messiah's advent, that God could dwell among us humans. It's why Yahshua was called Immanuel—God with us. Even if the temple were to be rebuilt, if it weren't built for this purpose (that God may dwell among men) then the whole thing would be a pointless exercise, a mockery of the Torah. (By the way, the prophets predict that there are two “temples” yet in Israel's future: the first will be built and usurped by the Antichrist during the

Tribulation; the second—the Millennial temple—will be built by the returning King, the Messiah, “...that I [Yahweh] may dwell among them.”

(429)

Do not remove the staves from the Ark. “And you shall make poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. You shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, that the ark may be carried by them. The poles shall be in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it.” (Exodus 25:13-15) The Ark was basically a wooden box covered with gold, about 45 inches in length, with rings at the corners. Two staves or poles were placed through the rings so the ark

could be carried from place to place by four Levites. Here we see that the poles were to remain in place—they were not to be removed from the rings, even though the ends of the poles would stick out through the curtain separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, where the Ark rested (see I Kings 8:8).

This injunction is kind of like saying, “Don’t paint the toenails on a triceratops.” Since the Ark is lost, we couldn’t remove the staves from its rings if we wanted to. Though I’m pleased to find yet another Mosaic precept I’ve never broken, I’m also curious: why were the unwieldy poles to be left in place?

To get to the bottom of this, we need to consider the function of the Ark. It was the base for the “mercy seat,” its solid gold lid, upon which was sprinkled the blood of the sacrificial animals each Day of Atonement. Thus as far as the symbols of the sanctuary were concerned, it was a necessary appurtenance for the temporary covering of the sins of Israel—no mercy seat, no atonement. It was to be carried only by Levites of the family of Kohath, but even they were not allowed to touch it. “And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is set to go, then the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them; but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. These are the things in the tabernacle of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry.” (Numbers 4:15) David forgot this when he first tried to move the Ark to Jerusalem, and the result was that Uzzah, son of Aminadab, was killed trying to keep it from falling to the ground. Ignorance of God’s instructions does not excuse us from their consequences.

It is instructive to examine the word translated “poles” or “staves.” The Hebrew term *bad* actually means alone, by oneself, isolated, the only entity in a class. The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament notes: “Positively, the word is used of the Lord’s incomparability and uniqueness in his exclusive claim to deity as seen in his extraordinary works....The word also has a negative connotation when a man is abandoned by his community or by God. Thus the unclean leper must suffer alone, apart from human fellowship.” So the word is in some ways akin to the familiar *qodesh*—holy, or set apart—but it also points out the loneliness associated with being abandoned. Does the quote, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” ring any bells? In the humanity of his sacrifice, Yahshua found Himself *bad*—utterly alone. So how do we get “poles” out of that? The plural of the word, *baddim*, picks up the connotation of being extended from something that stands alone, so it’s properly used of members, limbs, branches, or poles.

The reason the poles are left attached, then, is that they are extensions of that which is unique and alone—Yahweh’s Messiah. And who are these “extensions” who are not to be separated

from Him? Us, that's who. We believers are the means by which Yahshua the Messiah is "carried" to the world.

We are never removed from His presence.

(430)

Set the showbread and the frankincense before the Lord every Shabbat. "You shall set the showbread on the table before Me always." (Exodus 25:30) "You shall take fine flour and bake twelve cakes with it. Two-tenths of an ephah shall be in each cake. You shall set them in two rows, six in a row, on the pure gold table before Yahweh. And you shall put pure frankincense on each row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial, an offering made by fire to Yahweh. Every Sabbath he shall set it in order before Yahweh continually, being taken from the children of Israel by an everlasting covenant. And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy to him from the offerings of Yahweh made by fire, by a perpetual statute." (Leviticus 24:5-9) The symbolism surrounding the showbread is as rich as it is profuse. Twelve cakes or loaves (obviously a reference to the twelve tribes of Israel, and later to the twelve apostles of Yahshua—in other words, the whole household of faith) were to be baked with fine flour (solet) as opposed to meal (qemah). The difference was that the fine flour had been crushed and sifted to remove the bran, indicative of worthlessness or sin. Notice that the frankincense was to be sprinkled upon each row as a separate unit—God's plan for Israel is distinct. The pure gold of the table speaks of the purity we must rest upon if we are to come "before Yahweh."

Frankincense is a resin from the bark of a tree from the genus *Boswellia*. As the amber droplets of resin dry, a white dust forms, which explains the name: "Frankincense" is lebona, derived from the Hebrew word for "white," laban. The related verb laben (to be white) indicates moral purity, the cleansing of God which makes the sinner "as white as snow." This "whiteness" is sprinkled onto the loaves "for a memorial, an offering made by fire," telling us that we are to remember the judgment Christ endured in our stead, for it made us pure in God's sight. The setting out of the loaves on the Sabbath reminds us that we cannot work to attain this imputed purity. The showbread was to be eaten by "Aaron and his sons," in other words, the priesthood—those who minister in God's very presence, interceding between God and man. This today includes all people of faith in Yahweh, for the veil blocking access to the holy of holies has been torn in two—we believers may now boldly enter His presence in prayer. It's no wonder Yahshua described Himself as being "the bread of life."

(431)

Kindle lights in the Sanctuary. “You shall command the children of Israel that they bring you pure oil of pressed olives for the light, to cause the lamp to burn continually. In the tabernacle of meeting, outside the veil which is before the Testimony, Aaron and his sons shall tend it from evening until morning before Yahweh. It shall be a statute forever to their generations on behalf of the children of Israel.” (Exodus 27:20-21) Just as Yahshua is the bread of life, He is also the “Light of the world.” The sun would go down and the world would grow dark, but Yahweh saw to it that there would always be light in the sanctuary. What produced the light? Oil, resulting from the crushing of olives. This reminds us that Yahshua’s body had to be broken before His Holy Spirit could indwell us (see John 15:26; the symbolic connection between the Spirit of God and olive oil can be seen in Zechariah 4). It also points out that we who have God’s Spirit within us are the only light the world will see in these dark times. Again, it is Aaron and his sons who tend the lamps—that is, the priesthood of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The lampstand itself (described in Exodus 25:31-37 and 37:17-24) was a visual representation of Yahweh’s ubiquitous six-plus-one pattern. A central lamp was flanked by three “branches” on one side and three on the other, each bearing a lamp fashioned like an almond blossom with an ornamental knob and flower. The whole seven-branched menorah was made out of a single piece of pure gold weighing in at over 90 pounds. Like God’s “six days of creation” plus one of rest, or the six days of the work week followed by the Sabbath rest, I believe the six branches of the lampstand plus the center lamp are a timeline, an indication of God’s plan for mankind’s redemption from the Fall of Adam to the Millennial reign of Christ—six thousand years for us to work followed by one thousand to rest from our labors in Yahweh’s perfect world (and by the way, we are rapidly approaching the end of that sixth millennium).

(432)

The breastplate shall not be loosened from the ephod. “They shall bind the breastplate by means of its rings to the rings of the ephod, using a blue cord, so that it is above the intricately woven band of the ephod, and so that the breastplate does not come loose from the ephod.” (Exodus 28:28) In the previous chapter (Mitzvah #372) we reviewed the High Priest’s garments. The breastplate, you’ll recall, was adorned with twelve gemstones, representing the twelve tribes of Israel. His ephod was a skirt-like garment that covered the hips and thighs (worn in addition to the thigh-length trousers mentioned in verse 42). The ephod, affixed to the breastplate with golden rings and a blue cord, also had straps going over the shoulders. Two onyx stones set in gold rested upon the shoulders. Each bore the names of six of the sons of Israel. Thus the High Priest symbolically bore the weight of Israel upon his shoulders, as well as having them near his heart. It’s a picture of service and intercession. The reason the ephod and

breastplate were to remain attached was that service without love is worthless, just as love without service is impossible.

(433)

Offer up incense twice daily. “You shall make an altar to burn incense on; you shall make it of acacia wood. A cubit shall be its length and a cubit its width—it shall be square—and two cubits shall be its height. Its horns shall be of one piece with it. And you shall overlay its top, its sides all around, and its horns with pure gold; and you shall make for it a molding of gold all around. Two gold rings you shall make for it, under the molding on both its sides. You shall place them on its two sides, and they will be holders for the poles with which to bear it. You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. And you shall put it before the veil that is before the ark of the Testimony, before the mercy seat that is over the Testimony, where I will meet with you. Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before Yahweh throughout your generations.” (Exodus 30:1-8) The altar of incense was a small wooden table, about 18 inches square and three feet tall, covered with gold. Like the ark of the covenant, it was equipped with golden rings through which poles would be placed when it had to be moved. (Unlike with the Ark of the Covenant, there was no specific instruction to leave the staves in place.) It was not to be touched, for it was set apart for Yahweh’s purposes. The High Priest (prophetic of the Messiah) was the only one authorized to burn incense upon it.

Notice that each time the High Priest was to burn incense, he was also to tend to the lamps (see Mitzvah #431). The priest was to replenish the oil (representing the Holy Spirit who provides the light in our lives) when he burned the incense—a metaphor for prayer. One should not be done without the other—prayer is intimately associated with the filling of the Holy Spirit. The lampstand and the altar of incense were in the same room in the sanctuary, normally called “the Holy Place.” As you entered from the outer door (at the east end of the room) you’d see the table of showbread on your right, the golden lampstand on your left. Straight ahead—right in front of the veil separating the holy place from the Holy of Holies (where the Ark of the Covenant sat) was the altar of incense. You had to pass the altar of incense to get to the mercy seat. The lesson: atonement for sin could not be made without first communicating with Yahweh—it’s the place “where I will meet with you.”

Why was incense burned twice a day? In their own way, both specified hours speak of a new day. Every morning heralds a new opportunity to walk in God’s light. On the other hand, Yahweh specifically stated that sunset (not midnight, as we reckon it) would begin each

calendar day. I'm admittedly guessing here, but I believe the two new beginnings indicated by the burning of the incense may be prophetic of two messianic advents of Yahshua—one in which we were introduced to the Light of the World, and the other in which will dawn a whole new era of righteousness. Or perhaps we are being given a preview of Yahshua's instruction on prayer: "Our Father...may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

(434)

Do not offer strange incense nor any sacrifice upon the golden altar. "You shall not offer strange incense on [the altar of incense], or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; nor shall you pour a drink offering on it." (Exodus 30:9) The primary function of the altar of incense was to symbolize the prayers of Israel rising to Yahweh (whose Shekinah glory was to abide in the most holy place before which the altar stood). As David wrote, "Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice." (Psalm 141:2) The only other function it had was stated in the next verse: "And Aaron shall make atonement upon its horns once a year with the blood of the sin offering of atonement; once a year he shall make atonement upon it throughout your generations. It is most holy to Yahweh." (Exodus 30:10) On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would apply some of the blood of the sacrifice on the horns of this altar, once again linking prayer—communication with Yahweh—to atonement, the covering of our sins.

As we shall see (Mitzvah #439), the formula for the incense to be burned on this altar was very specific and very exclusive. This, I believe, speaks to the principle that for our prayers to be efficacious, they must be aligned with God's will. It's not that Yahweh wants to hear the mindless repetition of pre-approved formula prayers, like a minyan of Black Hats teetering at the Wailing Wall. Rather, He wants us to be sensitive to His will and purpose, and conversing with Him along those lines. If we ignore what Yahweh has already told us about His plans and preferences, or talk to God as if He's some sort of celestial Santa Claus, I'd say He perceives that as "strange incense." And it stinks.

(435)

The kohein shall wash his hands and feet at the time of service. "You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base also of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. And you shall put water in it, for Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet in water from it. When they go into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn an offering made by fire to Yahweh, they shall wash with water, lest they die. So they shall wash their hands and their feet, lest they die. And it shall be a statute forever to them—to him and his descendants throughout their generations." (Exodus

30:18-21) The whole tabernacle layout is designed to teach us how to approach God. We've already discussed the furnishings found within the tent of meeting: the table of showbread, the lampstand, and the altar of incense within the Holy Place, and then, behind the veil in the Holy of Holies, the Ark of the Covenant with its integral mercy seat—redemption's ground zero. But outside the tabernacle there were two items one had to pass before he even reached the front door. First was the altar upon which the sacrifices were slain and roasted. Then, standing between the altar and the tabernacle was the bronze laver described here.

It's one thing for the proper sacrifice to be made to atone for your sin—the function of the altar. It's quite another to be “clean” enough to stand before Yahweh. The altar denotes the sacrifice made; the laver symbolizes the sacrifice accepted. Note that the priest's whole body wasn't to be cleansed at the laver, but only his hands and feet, indicative of his work and his walk before God. We are reminded of the foot-washing scene between Yahshua and Peter in the upper room. Peter was questioning the appropriateness of the Lord of Creation stooping to wash his dirty feet, but Yahshua told him, “He who is already bathed needs only to wash his feet to make him completely clean.” (John 13:10) So it is with the laver: the sacrifice has been made at the altar, making us clean. All that's left to do is admit that our feet are still dirty from walking through this world, and that they need to be bathed in Christ's ongoing forgiveness. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

(436)

Prepare the oil of anointment and anoint high kohanim and kings with it. “Moreover Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: Also take for yourself quality spices—five hundred shekels of liquid myrrh, half as much sweet-smelling cinnamon (two hundred and fifty shekels), two hundred and fifty shekels of sweet-smelling cane, five hundred shekels of cassia, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, and a hin of olive oil. And you shall make from these a holy anointing oil, an ointment compounded according to the art of the perfumer. It shall be a holy anointing oil. With it you shall anoint the tabernacle of meeting and the ark of the Testimony; the table and all its utensils, the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense; the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the laver and its base. You shall consecrate them, that they may be most holy; whatever touches them must be holy. And you shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister to Me as priests.” (Exodus 30:22-30) Yahweh provided a very specific recipe for the oil that was to be used for anointing the priests and the consecrated tabernacle furnishings—all of which prophesied the Messiah in one way or another. (It was not specified for kings, as Maimonides asserts, nor is there any Biblical suggestion that Israelite kings were ever anointed with anything other than ordinary olive oil.)

The formula began with a hin (about a gallon) of olive oil, which as we have seen is symbolic of the Holy Spirit, the source of light in our lives. And what were these other ingredients? Myrrh is a resinous gum or oil from balsam or other trees with an oily bark. It is fragrant and slightly bitter, hence the name, mor, from a Hebrew root meaning bitterness—a reminder of the Messiah's sorrows endured on our behalf. (A shekel, by the way, was a little over a third of an ounce, so five hundred shekels would be about ten pounds.) Cinnamon (Hebrew qinamown) is the familiar fragrant bark we still use as a spice to this day. Its use as an aphrodisiac (along with myrrh) is suggested in Proverbs 7:17. The "sweet-smelling cane" is qaneh, an aromatic reed, but one also used as a standard of measure, normally six cubits. Yahshua's human moral perfection is the standard by which we are all measured—and fall short. The last ingredient was cassia (qidah), a fragrant plant ingredient used in perfumes and oils, the "fragrant oil" spoken of in Matthew 26:12 and Luke 23:56—something used to prepare the Messiah for His burial—both before and after He gave Himself up to be crucified. The mixture, then, describes the Messiah, Yahshua, whose Spirit-filled life was the epitome of love, the standard of holiness, and sweet salvation achieved through bitter suffering.

We believers are said to be "crucified with Christ." How interesting it is, then, to read in Solomon's love poem (an unblushing declaration of our Savior's visceral love toward us, His betrothed) this description: "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits, fragrant henna with spikenard, spikenard and saffron, calamus [qidah] and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices—a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon." (Song of Solomon 4:12-15) It appears that we are not only crucified with Him (freeing us from the condemnation of the law), we are anointed with Him as well. As the bride of Christ, we will reign with Him as kings and priests. That's why it was illegal to counterfeit the formula or use it on "strangers."

(437)

Do not compound oil for lay use after the formula of the anointing oil. "And you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'This shall be a holy anointing oil to Me throughout your generations. It shall not be poured on man's flesh; nor shall you make any other like it, according to its composition. It is holy, and it shall be holy to you. Whoever compounds any like it, or whoever puts any of it on an outsider, shall be cut off from his people.'" (Exodus 30:31-33) For an anointing oil to be "holy," its use and formula would have been strictly exclusive to the purposes Yahweh had outlined in His Word. First, the recipe for the anointing oil itself was not to be duplicated or simulated. Because the oil spoke of the true Messiah and His mission, anything

made to be “like it” would by definition describe a “false Messiah,” another path to God—all the more deadly because of its similarity to the real thing. The better the counterfeit, the more damage it can do. Satan’s most destructive fakes blend ninety percent truth with ten percent lies. His most deceptive counterfeit? Religion. Search the scriptures: Yahweh never speaks of religion in a positive light. He’s after a personal relationship with us, but religion is an unholy anointing oil—a deceptive substitute for the genuine familial relationship God seeks to have with us.

(438)

Do not anoint a stranger with the anointing oil. “This shall be a holy anointing oil to Me throughout your generations. It shall not be poured on man’s flesh.... Whoever puts any of it on an outsider shall be cut off from his people.” (Exodus 30:31-33) By the same token, the real Messiah cannot be comprehended by an “outsider,” someone who has no relationship with Yahweh. Well meaning “strangers” can talk about “the historical Jesus” all they want, but they won’t begin to understand what He’s really about, because they don’t have His Spirit living within them. That last phrase, “Whoever puts any of it on an outsider shall be cut off from his people,” should give us pause. Yahweh is warning us against suggesting secular solutions for problems only God can solve—anointing “outsiders” with Messianic status. Don’t follow men; don’t trust in programs; don’t rely on law, tradition, or religion. Yahshua alone is the Messiah, the anointed one.

(439)

Do not compound anything after the formula of the incense. “And Yahweh said to Moses: “Take sweet spices, stacte and onycha and galbanum, and pure frankincense with these sweet spices; there shall be equal amounts of each. You shall make of these an incense, a compound according to the art of the perfumer, salted, pure, and holy. And you shall beat some of it very fine, and put some of it before the Testimony in the tabernacle of meeting where I will meet with you. It shall be most holy to you. But as for the incense which you shall make, you shall not make any for yourselves, according to its composition. It shall be to you holy for Yahweh. Whoever makes any like it, to smell it, he shall be cut off from his people.” (Exodus 30:34-38) The prescribed incense was much like the anointing oil in that a specific formula was to be followed, one used exclusively by the priesthood in the sanctuary service. In Mitzvot #433 and 434, we examined the altar on which this incense was to be burned, and the significance of the incense—primarily a metaphor for prayer. Here we see the recipe for the incense itself.

Stacte is a resin or gum, but the Hebrew word (natap) stresses the form: a drop of this ingredient. We should be immediately reminded of Dr. Luke’s account of Yahshua’s intense

prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. He reports, “And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. And His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” (Luke 22:44) Stacte, then, implores us to pray passionately. Galbanum is an aromatic bitter gum resin from the Ferula plant family. We are thus reminded to take our bitterness and sorrow to God, for He understands our grief. Frankincense we have seen before (Mitzvah #430): its name is related to being white—in other words, moral purity or imputed righteousness. As James reminds, “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” (James 5:16) Salt added flavor and acted as a preservative, which is why Yahshua called believers “the salt of the earth.”

And finally, the most surprising ingredient (to my mind) is “onycha,” the Hebrew shacheleth. This is the “processed claw-shaped closing flap of certain types of mollusks (such as strombus) of the genus Mollusca with a pungent odor when burned.” (Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains) This ingredient is not only fauna—not flora—in origin, the animal from which it comes is unclean. It’s as if Yahweh is telling us, “I know you’re not perfect. I know you’re defiled. Let’s talk anyway. My Spirit, living within you, knows what to say.” Paul informs us, “The Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” (Romans 8:26)

(440)

He who, in error, makes unlawful use of sacred things, shall make restitution of the value of his trespass and add a fifth. “If a person commits a trespass, and sins unintentionally in regard to the holy things of Yahweh, then he shall bring to Yahweh as his trespass offering a ram without blemish from the flocks, with your valuation in shekels of silver according to the shekel of the sanctuary, as a trespass offering. And he shall make restitution for the harm that he has done in regard to the holy thing, and shall add one-fifth to it and give it to the priest. So the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering, and it shall be forgiven him.” (Leviticus 5:15-16) This whole passage is about making atonement for unintentional sins—mistakes, lapses, or omissions—things we all do every day. When Moses talks about “doing harm to the holy things,” he probably wasn’t thinking about things like backing your chariot into the altar and putting a big dent in it. The word “things” isn’t really there in the original. I believe the thought is more like, “inadvertently treating as common what has been set apart to Yahweh.”

Let’s cut to the chase, shall we? That means you and me. We have been bought with a price. We have been made holy—sanctified and set apart to Yahweh—by the sacrifice of our Messiah. Why then do we treat our bodies as profane things? Why do we ignore the Spirit dwelling within

us six days a week; and when we do pay attention to God's word, why do we set aside a different day of the week from the one He declared holy? We mean no harm, it's true. But an unintentional sin is still sin.

(441)

Remove the ashes from the altar. "This is the law of the burnt offering: The burnt offering shall be on the hearth upon the altar all night until morning, and the fire of the altar shall be kept burning on it. And the priest shall put on his linen garment, and his linen trousers he shall put on his body, and take up the ashes of the burnt offering which the fire has consumed on the altar, and he shall put them beside the altar. Then he shall take off his garments, put on other garments, and carry the ashes outside the camp to a clean place. And the fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not be put out. And the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and lay the burnt offering in order on it; and he shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. A fire shall always be burning on the altar; it shall never go out." (Leviticus 6:9-13) It's obvious that the ashes would have to be cleaned out of the altar periodically. We need to be asking ourselves why the procedure was to be done as outlined here. This had to be a dirty job: why was the priest instructed to put on his special priestly garments for taking the ashes out of the altar, and then don ordinary clothes for transporting them out of the camp?

Once again, it's a prophetic insight into the role of the Messiah. The ashes weren't just burned wood. They also contained the remains of the previous day's sacrifices. Thus although consumed, they were still holy and significant to Yahweh. That's the reason for the linen garments, symbolizing the imputed righteousness of the saints, righteousness that had been made possible by the sacrifice, now reduced to ash.

But what happens next is where we should all sit up and take notice. The priest isn't just taking out the trash, for the ashes are holy. Now he puts on "profane" garments and removes the ashes from the altar to a "clean" place outside the camp. ("Clean" is the Hebrew word tahowr, meaning ritually or physically clean, pure (as in "pure gold"), or flawless—free from defect or impurity.) For the Messiah's sacrifice to be complete, He had to endure separation from the Father; He had to be sent "outside the camp," and this at the hands of profane and defiled men. Sacrifice goes beyond the pain of Passover—the Feast of Unleavened Bread is also necessary—the separation of us from our sin as Yahshua was parted from the Father.

(442)

Keep fire always burning on the altar of the burnt-offering. "The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not be put out. And the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and lay

the burnt offering in order on it; and he shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. A fire shall always be burning on the altar; it shall never go out.” (Leviticus 6:12-13) If the temple sacrifices were mere rituals designed to appease an angry God, then it wouldn’t matter if the fire was put out and then started up again when we figured He needed some more appeasing. But they’re nothing of the sort. They’re symbols of Yahweh’s plan for our redemption. The fire is not to go out because it symbolizes Yahweh’s eternal presence, purity, and power. Fire speaks of judgment—not so much wrath as separation: It is fire that removes the dross from gold and fire that will separate the blessed from the cursed (see Matthew 25:41). This is very important to Yahweh. In these five verses, He tells us to keep the altar’s fire going no fewer than six different times.

(443)

Do not extinguish the fire on the altar. “The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not be put out. And the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and lay the burnt offering in order on it; and he shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. A fire shall always be burning on the altar; it shall never go out.” (Leviticus 6:12-13) The priests were not only cautioned not to let the fire die from neglect, but they were also specifically warned not to put it out intentionally. As far as Maimonides was concerned, this was merely a negative re-statement of the previous affirmative mitzvah—padding the list to come up with the requisite 613 laws. But it’s worth noting Paul’s parallel admonition in I Thessalonians 5:19: “Do not quench the Spirit.” How do we do that? He goes on to explain: “Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast to what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.” By scoffing at or ignoring prophetic scripture, by being too lazy or apathetic to check the truth of what we’re being told by the media, our politicians, and even our preachers against the standard of the Word of God, by letting go of what is good, pure, and right, and compromising instead with the world’s evil agenda, we quench the influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives—we extinguish the fire on the altar.

(444)

A kohein shall not enter the Sanctuary with disheveled hair. “Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the people.” (Leviticus 10:6) I’m not going to bother addressing the issue of whether the original Hebrew text is talking about disheveled hair or merely an uncovered head. There is a far greater scriptural crisis here—one the rabbis habitually employ with reckless abandon: taking God’s Word out of context. Leviticus 10 is the record of the sin of Aaron’s two sons, Nadab and Abihu, who showed their contempt for Yahweh’s instructions by trying to invent a look-alike religion. “Each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before Yahweh, which He had not

commanded them. So fire went out from Yahweh and devoured them, and they died before Yahweh. And Moses said to Aaron, 'This is what Yahweh spoke, saying: "By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified."' (Leviticus 10:1-3) Moses then informed his brother of the hard reality: because he was the High Priest, it would be improper for Aaron to publicly mourn for his two sons (the crux of verse 6), for to do so would be to characterize Yahweh as evil for requiring holiness of His priests. Remember, the High Priest is symbolic of the Messiah, who would someday rule the earth with a scepter of iron. The people, however, were encouraged to lament the passing of Nadab and Abihu—presumably while bewailing the stupidity of their sin—knowing that they too were flawed and foolish. The bottom line: Maimonides was totally clueless in identifying this as a general precept governing priestly grooming.

(445)

A kohein shall not enter the Sanctuary with torn garments. "Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the people." (Leviticus 10:6) Same verse, same story. The application for today's believers should not be overlooked, of course. Yahshua our High Priest will not mourn our passing if our contempt for the Word of God is what got us killed. Yahweh's judgments are always just. Although instances of His personal wrath (as with Nadab and Abihu) have been rare of late, don't get complacent: all of that is about to change. The Day of Yahweh's wrath is approaching like a freight train. If we characterize Yahweh's justice as unfair, we will be walking into a politically correct death trap: "...lest you die, and wrath come upon all the people."

(446)

The kohein shall not leave the Courtyard of the Sanctuary during service. "You shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die, for the anointing oil of Yahweh is upon you." (Leviticus 10:7) We haven't changed subjects. We're still talking about the priests' proper reaction to God's wrath upon those who would usurp His authority through the practice of religion. One upon whom is the oil of anointing—metaphorical of Christ and the Holy Spirit (see Mitzvah #436)—must not (indeed, cannot) leave the tabernacle, which illustrates Yahweh's plan of redemption. That's why it's called the "tabernacle of meeting"—it's where we meet God.

Is it just me, or do you too hear echoes of the subsequent Tribulation here? God's anointed (that's us) are to be kept out of the coming wrath by remaining at the tabernacle of meeting (where Christ is). And we will not mourn the fate of those who have chosen to be God's enemies. But do you remember what I said about the "people" mourning for the blasphemous

Nadab and Abihu? In this sense, those not standing at the sanctuary—will surely weep bitterly when God’s wrath falls upon those whose plan was to lead them astray.

(447)

An intoxicated person shall not enter the Sanctuary nor give decisions in matters of the Law. “Then Yahweh spoke to Aaron, saying: Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean, and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which Yahweh has spoken to them by the hand of Moses.” (Leviticus 10:8-11) People do stupid things when they’re drunk, and the more responsibility they hold, the more important it is that they have all their faculties intact. The priests had the most important jobs in Israel, whether they knew it or not: acting out Yahweh’s plan of redemption through the rituals they were told to perform. Every detail of those rites pointed in some way to the sacrifice Yahweh had determined to make to atone for the sins of mankind.

Beyond that, it’s a question of who’s in charge—under whose influence are we operating? Paul admonishes us: “Do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.” (Ephesians 5:17-21) The alternative to a chemically impaired state is described here, and it’s a pretty good definition of a “priest’s” duties, parallel in many ways to Moses’ reasons for priestly sobriety given in Leviticus.

(448)

Revere the Sanctuary. “You shall keep My Sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary: I am Yahweh.” (Leviticus 19:30) Since there’s no temple anymore, today’s Jews apply this precept to their synagogues instead. But as we have seen, it was the sanctuary—the precise layout, function, and order of the tabernacle and the temple that was modeled upon it—that reflected the plan of God. The synagogue (or church) today is just a building. Plain or fancy, it holds no significance beyond what’s in the hearts of the people who meet there. In fact, “reverence” for the synagogue is dangerously close to being a violation of the Second Commandment. In showing reverence for the sanctuary/tabernacle/temple, however, we are (or should be) showing respect for the God whose plan of salvation it represents. By the same token, a refusal to recognize what the sanctuary actually signifies is surely indicative of a distinct lack of reverence for it.

(449)

When the Ark is carried, it should be carried on the shoulder. “But to the sons of Kohath [Moses gave no carts and oxen], because theirs was the service of the holy things, which they carried on their shoulders.” (Numbers 7:9) After the tabernacle and its appurtenances had been constructed, the people of Israel brought offerings to Yahweh—six oxcarts full. Moses gave four of these carts to the Merari Levites to help them perform their duties (Numbers 4:31-32), and two to the Levite family of Gershon (Numbers 4:25-26). However, the third family of Levites, the Kohathites, were not given carts or oxen because it was their job to carry the holy objects that were within the sanctuary, notably the Ark of the Covenant, the golden lampstand, the altar of incense, and the table of showbread, but also the little stuff—the bowls, wick trimmers, trays, and other implements and utensils.

These were all to be carried, not carted: “Then they shall take all the utensils of service with which they minister in the sanctuary, put them in a blue cloth, cover them with a covering of badger skins, and put them on a carrying beam.” (Numbers 4:12) A “carrying beam” (Hebrew: *mowt*) was a pole or yoke used to suspend objects for carrying—like the huge grape clusters the twelve spies brought back from Canaan. It is derived from a verb meaning “to shake,” for the carrying pole would shake as the bearers walked. Why were the tabernacle’s holy things—the objects symbolic of the Messiah—carried on a pole like this? Because the Messiah would Himself carry our sins on Calvary’s pole. He would be “shaken” on our behalf. The word “cross” in the New Testament is a mistranslation of the Greek *stauros*, meaning upright pole. Yahshua would be nailed to this *stauros* and its crosspiece (called the *patibulum* in Latin) in a direct parallel to the serpent in the wilderness being lifted on a pole (this time the Hebrew word is *nes*—a standard, banner, or signal pole) to save the snake-bitten Israelites. (Compare Numbers 21:9 to John 3:14.) The “cross” is a pre-Christian symbol that obfuscates what God was trying to teach us.

Why would God trouble himself with such elaborate word-pictures? The Psalmist explains: “Cast your burden on Yahweh, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved [i.e., shaken—*mowt*].” (Psalm 55:22) The Kohathite Levites carried the Messianic symbols on a pole because the Messiah would bear our sins on a pole, all so that we would not have to carry the burden ourselves. That’s love, pure and simple. Somehow I get the feeling that Maimonides didn’t understand much of this.