

## The World Is Upheld By Service Ezra Klein

The commandment to Adam at the time he was created “to till it and tend it” (Gen. 2:15) expresses the lifelong obligation to develop the Garden of Eden. Part of this vision includes protecting the quality of the material world. A beraita brought in *Avot d’Rabbi Natan* deals with the global statement that “the world is blessed on behalf of its inhabitants” and links this trait to the Temple service. We will try to explore the philosophical elements that underlie this view and to expose a few of the ways in which the work of “tending it” are expressed in the Temple. Afterwards we will see how we might expand this principle into the concept of holiness in Judaism.

Shimon the Righteous would say, the world is upheld by three things: Torah, service (*avodah*) and deeds of lovingkindness...

By service how? For as long as the Temple service endures, the world is blessed on behalf of its inhabitants and rains fall in their time as it says “to love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and all your soul. I will give your land’s rain in its season, the first and last rain... and I will give grass in your field for your animals.”

Let us note that the author of the beraita sees this blessing as a *result*: “For as long as the Temple service endures, the world is blessed on behalf of its inhabitants.” The latter portion of the beraita describes a mystical influence, while the opening states that the Temple service is a catalyst for activities through which the world is blessed. The *Binyan Yehoshua* commentary describes the scope of the influence of this blessing: “The Temple housed the showbread and would also include the Omer sacrifice - and because of this, blessing was extended to the harvest.” A possible explanation of this blessing is this: when the community harnesses its powers and applies them in order to consecrate them to the achievement of lofty ideals, the entire effort is elevated.

One might have thought that if the community was enlisted in a service that was not related to the Temple, the same elevation would occur. However, the author of the beraita believed that the Temple service contained an authenticity that prevented any distraction and made greater success possible:

When there is no Temple service, the world is not blessed by its inhabitants and the rains do not fall in their time. As it says: “take care not to be lured away... and he will stop up the heavens and there will be no rain.”

The author of the beraita speaks of service as “upholding,” and we may infer that even if they only begin this service, blessing will follow. The daily service begins with the incense offering, which teaches how to combine different types of plants to produce a new, beneficial product. The initial stage of the offering of any sacrifice is an inspection of its entire body to ensure that it is whole and free of any blemish. “Wholeness” has two meanings - the aspiration to authenticity, and the aspiration for wholeness in the world.

Further, the statistical likelihood of finding a “whole” animal depends upon the conditions in which it was raised. In the Mishnah of tractate *Tamid* 3:3, the process of leading a lamb for the daily *tamid* offering from the “Chamber of Lambs” is described, and the Mishnah of tractate *Eduyot* 2:5 relates that there was a minimum number of lambs required to be on hand at any time to supply the demand. These laws would have required the priests of the Chamber to take steps to improve the conditions in which the lambs were raised.

The beraita continues by finding a source in the prophet Haggai 2:15-16:

And so he says: “And now take thought, from this day backward: As long as no stone had been laid on another in the House of the Lord, if one came to a heap of twenty measures [of grain], it would yield only ten; and if one came to a wine vat to skim off fifty measures, the press would yield only twenty.”

Haggai prophesied in the era following the return to Israel from the Babylonian exile with Ezra the Scribe, and was commanded to begin the rebuilding of the Temple. While the Jewish community in exile and in Israel busied itself with establishing the second Jewish state, it did not begin to establish the second Temple within that state. The prophet states that it is important to realize that despite the entire public’s engagement in an ideal that has a central material aspect, that ideal will not succeed in elevating material life - and that while their importance can’t be denied, all achievements made towards this effort will be less than expected.

The tanna reads the words of the prophet closely:

Why doesn’t [the prophet] say regarding the wine vat “twenty measures would yield ten” as he says regarding grain? Because the wine vat is a more propitious sign than grain. This teaches that as long as the wine is afflicted, it is an ominous sign for the entire year.

Wine libations are brought with most sacrifices, in particular the *tamid* [daily] offerings and the *musaf* [additional] offerings, such that wine libations were brought to the altar daily and usually several times a day. Maimonides in the *Guide of the Perplexed* states that this fact puzzled him, and even though a colleague tried to provide the rationale that wine makes it possible to perfect the soul, he was not satisfied by it. The beraita offers a surprising explanation, according to which wine was not chosen for itself, but rather for its characteristics of growth. The cultivation of wine has an influence on the remainder of the year’s produce. It’s possible that this is the source of Rashba’s view that wine offerings need to be made not with the most desirable (i.e. oldest) wine but with that which is closest to its natural state.

By way of conclusion, the beraita addresses why, from a mystical perspective, God did not make blessing dependent on other commandments:

The Israelites said before God, Master of the Universe, why have you done this to us? The prophetic spirit [through Haggai] responded, "You have been expecting much and getting little... Because of My House which lies in ruins, while you all hurry to your own houses." Haggai 1:9. But if you busy yourselves with the Temple service, I will bless you as I did before, as is written, "Take note... from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, from the day when the foundation was laid for the Lord's Temple... while the seed is still in the granary, and the vine, fig tree, pomegranate, and olive tree have not yet borne fruit. For from this day on, I will send blessings." Haggai 2:18-19. From this we learn that there is no service more dear to God than the Temple service.

If so, as a result of the importance of the improvement of the quality of our environment, as expressed in the authentic commandment to Adam "and he placed him in the Garden of Eden to till it and tend it" Gen. 2:15, many halachic considerations were developed that encourage and publicize the importance of investment in our world - for the sake of the Temple service.

The Mishnah in Tractate *Keilim* Chapter 1:6-9 lists ten levels of holiness. Holiness is a combination of laws that set a unique viewpoint. The levels of holiness increase with the stringency of the laws that are added to the base. It seems that this characteristic of addition to the base requires laws that relate to the environment in both simple and deep, well-developed ways, depending on the level of holiness, as we will show.

Mishnah 9 states that the tenth and highest level of holiness is "the holy of holies... where only the high priest may enter on Yom Kippur during the service." According to Rav's approach the high priest's prayer upon leaving the holy of holies is "May it be your will that if this year be hot - let it also be rainy." The repetition of the word "be" reflects a petition for an essential change to the character of the year.

Mishnah 8 describes the Women's Courtyard in the Temple as the sixth level of holiness, and the highest level that all of Israel were allowed to approach. Tractate *Midot* 2:5 explains that the "Chamber of Wood" stood in the Courtyard, where the wood for the altar was examined prior to being brought to the altar to ensure that it did not contain any worms. This alerts the public to the need to be aware of the preservation of the quality of their environment.

The holiness of walled cities is the second level of holiness. In Rashi's view in Bavli Shevuot 16, a portion of the holiness of the walled cities is the commandment to preserve the beauty of the cities through their fields and pastures, as described in the Torah. According to the Ridbaz in *Hilchot Shemita v'Yovel* 13:2, it is reasonable to learn from the laws of holiness the proper conduct in settling all of the land of Israel.

Mishnah 6 states that the holiness of the land of Israel is the basic holiness and flows from the fact that "we bring from it the *Omer* and first fruits and two breads," all offerings of produce that may not be brought from any other land. In *Binyan Yehoshua*, cited above, the show bread, whose preparation takes place in the seventh, eighth and ninth levels of holiness, is also

mentioned as a source of blessing. It emerges that the majority of the levels of holiness contain laws that suggest ways to encourage preserving the world.

The laws of the Temple and of holiness lead to the development of an elevated relationship with the environment and its quality. The holiness of the land includes the offering of the finest sacrifices and the holiness of walled cities, and the Levite cities teaches us to invest in the beauty of the city. In the holiness of the sixth, we are asked to act as active critics regarding the quality of plant and animal products. In the seventh level of holiness and above, humanity is asked to offer types of sustenance whose development influences the development of the world for the Temple's sake, and to pray for the health of creation.