Leading Towards Holiness:
Approaching the *Kohen* (Priest) and the Book of Leviticus as Ancient Leadership Resources for Contemporary Jewish Communal Leaders

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

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Spring 2018

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ABSTRACT

In this rabbinic thesis project, I present a model for rabbinic leadership and for clergy-lay relationships based on the *kohen,* the priest, in the Hebrew Bible. So often people dismiss the biblical Book of Leviticus and the priestly role as irrelevant to contemporary readers. My goal is to analyze the descriptions of the priest's functions in Leviticus and their implications. I argue that through the figure of the priest, Leviticus offers us an example of what might be described as a leadership of aspirational realism. This understanding of the priest has its roots in Ahad Ha'am's essay "Priest and Prophet" (1893). He asserts that the priest situates himself clearly within reality and strives to find "not what ought to be, but what can be…" in his leadership role. I expand on this insight to show that the priestly model offers contemporary Jewish leaders an approach to leadership that is oriented towards wholeness of relationships and gradual, rather than radical, change.

I approach this project with a theoretical framework based on modern scholars who analyze Leviticus in atypical ways, going beyond a study of it as solely cultic and legal literature. The influential anthropologist Mary Douglas asserts that when read with the right framework, Leviticus offers a radical, beautiful take the relationship between God, the community, and boundaries of holiness that can transform how we see Leviticus and understand it. I also rely on the work of Jacob Milgrom, the biblical scholar who specialized in Leviticus. His exegesis of Leviticus always keeps in mind that the priest was responsible for high-stakes ritual work that affected the entire community, and had real implications in the lives of individuals. I also present a review of contemporary Jewish and secular leadership literature, situating this project in the larger body of this genre.

In Chapter 1, readers will be invited first to deepen their understanding of Leviticus and of the biblical priesthood. Chapter 2: Defining Key Terms outlines crucial concepts and vocabulary found in the book of Leviticus. Chapter 3: Defining the Roles of the Priests continues elucidating the roles of the priest. After a close reading of the book of Leviticus with multiple commentaries, I distilled the text down to four major roles the priest played in Israelite society. I also outline a number of leadership challenges that the priests confronted. Chapter 4: Biblical Priestly Leadership Narratives pivots away from Leviticus to the rest of the Hebrew Bible to present two major priestly narratives. Aaron and Ezra provide two very different accounts of priestly leadership that are instructive for contemporary rabbinic leaders. Chapter 5: The Priestly Model of Leadership illustrates a contemporary model of priestly leadership for use by rabbis in partnership with their congregations. I argue for the relevance of priestly leadership in congregational life today in a number of ways. While establishing the key facets of this approach to leadership, I also offer a few questions and examples that demonstrate the potential effectiveness of employing priestly leadership principles to a number of situations.

To make this analysis of Leviticus through the lens of leadership as useful as possible, I conclude with an Appendix, a mini-curriculum guide on the subject. It consists of a series of four detailed lesson plans with backup material. Each of these lesson plans introduces one facet of the priestly leadership model, with text study and suggested discussion questions. I hope that leaders will consider the lessons of priestly leadership engaging, and that these will instill in them a new appreciation for the style and content of Leviticus, shedding fresh light on the biblical book that stands at the center of the Torah.

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Acknowledgements

When I began to think about my rabbinic thesis project over a year ago, I never could have imagined how much this work would come to mean to me. I have loved the time I spent working closely with Leviticus. I know that personally I have gleaned incredible wisdom from our ancient texts and our ancestors in leadership, the *kohanim*. My rabbinic thesis has tapped into many of my passions including jumping into unfamiliar texts and making challenging parts of our tradition accessible to others in new ways, and it has been a rewarding process.

My first thanks are to my thesis adviser Dr. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi. In addition to being a brilliant scholar and gifted teacher, she is a warm, compassionate mentor. I appreciate the time she spent giving me a fuller understanding of Leviticus and the new ways she is able to open the text up to readers. Without her careful editing, challenging questions, honest perspective, and many laughter-filled pizza lunches, I would never have finished with something I could be so proud of today.

I also must thank Dr. Michael Zeldin, Dr. Isa Aron, and Dr. Madelyn Katz, my dear teachers and resident leadership experts. The conversations we had in class about Jewish organizational leadership and the call for leadership to reflect our most sacred values undoubtedly shaped this project and I am grateful for their guidance. Special thanks are due to Michael and Madelyn for the long-term loan of their incredible libraries on leadership.

Thank you to Rabbi Richard Levy for being my teacher, adviser, and friend for the last five years on the Los Angeles HUC-JIR campus. Our monthly meetings always resulted in wonderful ideas, exciting plans, and a shared admiration for one another's gifts. He helped me decide to move forward with this topic in the first place, so I would be nowhere without his belief that this was a worthwhile, important project.

Finally, I must thank my husband Joe Ferris, my family, classmates, and many friends, who have loved and supported me in so many ways during the incredible amount of time I invested in creating this thesis from scratch. They now probably know more about Leviticus than they did a year ago and I hope they are better for it! I appreciate all their additional editing and great conversations with me. I know they never miss an opportunity to express their pride and interest in my work and it makes me a better (soon-to-be) rabbi.

I firmly believe that Leviticus and the priests who served God at the altar have much to teach contemporary Jewish leaders about leading with a strong sense of what is possible for their communities. Priestly leadership calls on rabbis to guide communities in making meaning out of transitions, to teach with an eye toward empowering others, and to seek opportunities to find support and balance in their work. I especially hope that rabbis and lay leaders benefit from the model I have created for the work they do together, including the Appendix, to begin meaningful, substantial conversations about their shared vision for holiness in the Jewish community.

- L. Levine, January 2018

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Imagine a day in the life of a 21st century rabbi. Perhaps you envision a day that begins with morning prayers and deep engagement with Torah study. All of her meetings consist of congregants heeding her sage advice. His efforts help craft beautiful life-cycle rituals with everyone's appreciation. Everywhere, creative, new programs are planned for the religious school, and people give generously to support new initiatives. He rallies his staff to work together as a collaborative, sensitive team with all the cutting-edge professional practices in use. She meets with the Board President to discuss their shared vision for the synagogue, and they seamlessly craft a to-do list that will help them accomplish their goals and serve the community. There is a time and a season for everything. Nobody asks awkward questions about their spouse, children, or their personal appearance. This is just some of what most communities sincerely wish for their rabbis whose vocation has led them to their congregation, and to service of God and the Jewish people.

Now, let us leave the world of the ideal and enter the real world. When he teaches Torah study, one person constantly interrupts him to share his views on God, and another jumps in to give the class a history lesson, taking the class away form their study of the weekly Torah portion. In the middle of checking hundreds of emails, the phone rings: a congregant's mother died and the funeral absolutely has to be Wednesday morning, no exceptions, the same time the rabbi had already scheduled an appointment with a struggling teen. The rabbi needs to call her own parents back. The book group complains that their room is too hot, and their assistant says it is really too cold. A long-time member refuses to pay

dues and the board wants the rabbi to intervene. The rabbi can still hold high hopes for their work and want to initiate transformation, but for the moment it is necessary to live with the community as it is, at least for a while longer. Sometimes the rabbi just needs to "put out the fires" of the moment. The idea to change Shabbat services, or create a new program for engaging seniors, or revamping the mission statement, is put on the back burner in to deal with immediate and important needs.

Who can the rabbi look to for guidance and inspiration? What Jewish models exist for them to follow as leaders who aspire to holiness but are also acutely aware of, and involved in, the complicated reality of daily communal life? Perhaps the rabbi wishes for a manual to provide some guidance. Fortunately, rabbis have a wide menu of texts and roles models to seek out, and the leadership literature aimed at them is indeed extensive. Nevertheless, the time is ripe to add one more source to the list, an overlooked, and unconventional source: the *kohen*, the priest, and Leviticus, a book that lies at the physical center of the Torah but rarely receives serious attention from contemporary Jewish leaders.

If we can look past the obscure language, the carefully described ritual sacrifices, and the dry style that many scholars have disparaged, what we can uncover is an approach to leadership that many rabbis crave, yet did not know was available to them already in our sacred texts. It is a leadership style that dances constantly between the holy and the ordinary.

Leviticus proposes a Jewish way of living where holiness is accessible to anyone, sins are named and forgiven without shame or moralizing, and every moment has greater, sacred meaning. Priestly leadership gives rabbis and communities permission to imagine an ideal world that reflects their highest values even as they stand firmly grounded in the reality of the world as they know it. It also helps them work towards that ideal world with fresh insights.

Anyone who has held a leadership role knows that different circumstances require different kinds of leadership. In some cases, organizations are looking to truly transform themselves and reshape their mission and programming in a radical way. If the community is willing and the leaders are prepared to blaze a new trail forward, they can truly transform a major part of their synagogue's function and programming, or take a totally new direction for the synagogue. However, opportunities of this nature are rare in most synagogues. Sometimes, leadership means managing the day-to-day life of the congregation while staying focused on the community's existing vision for Jewish life.

The priests in the Bible were tasked with sustaining the seemingly mundane while keeping the people in proper relationship with God as they strive for holiness. In their context, this meant maintaining boundaries of purity. Just one small issue, like the wrong animal organs, an impure vessel, or a blotchy patch of skin, had high-risk, divine stakes. Restoring individuals, leaders, and the community to purity, putting out those little fires, and managing disruptions that threaten the wholeness of the community, were appreciated as critically important work that allowed Israel to endure in their covenant with God. With that framing in mind, keeping the lights on in the building becomes a holy task, as important as keeping the spiritual light of the community burning.

Rabbis can do the same important, sacred work in any communal context they face. Elevating mundane tasks that contribute to a larger sense of holiness can transform the way congregants see their synagogue and their rabbi. When people slide backwards and make mistakes, rabbinic leaders can bring them back to their vision of the holy and enable them to do better. This is what priests make possible in the Bible. The book of Leviticus has much to say on this subject. Just as in the context of Leviticus, it is ultimately our established

communal boundaries, existing structures, and working infrastructure for living in relationship that sustain us. Just as Leviticus does, we know that keeping core values at the forefront, and empowering the entire community to learn and lead, can move our congregations forward. When mistakes occur or challenges arise, they need not be fatal; in the context of Leviticus they can be instructive. Rabbis can use the priestly leadership model to help integrate ruptures into the story of their community's shared history. Priestly leaders leaders in our time who have learned from the priestly models are the ones who can make important distinctions for us, and identify problems without condemning. Priestly leadership can continue to draw congregations ever closer to each other and to their vision for Jewish living. It can also imbue congregations with an appreciation of the holy that is inherent in the seemingly ordinary.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Research in Leadership Literature

To derive a new model of leadership and the role of the priest from Leviticus, in addition to studying the primary source texts, I drew on a number of resources from the already vast body of Jewish and secular leadership literature. These types of books range widely in their approach to presenting leadership and management, the relationship between contemporary work and biblical teachings, the concrete tools they offer leaders to use, and the balance of theory and practice they choose to strike. They aim to provide guidance for transforming an organization's culture, shifting relationships dynamics between the leader and their employees, advocating for or against traditional organizational structures, looking to the Bible with figures like Abraham and Moses as role models, among many, many critical

topics. To construct the robust, clear theory of priestly leadership that I aim to propose, a few authors on leadership proved particularly helpful.

Joseph L. Badaracco, Jr. asserts in *Leading Quietly* that the most effective leaders do their work quietly, moving patiently and carefully.[1] Typically, Western culture praises leaders who are heroic, who take big risks and sacrifice themselves for a greater cause. This public, outwardly courageous model of leadership might seem appealing, but it is not accessible to the vast majority of people, or even useful for most situations that require leadership.[2] He claims that most leadership is required in everyday situations. The author's guidelines for quiet leadership echo certain aspects of the experience of the priesthood in the Hebrew Bible. Quiet leadership requires a firm grasp on what one can and cannot control in any situation, as well as the ability to clarify the motives of others.[3]

A helpful chapter in *Leadership: Theory and Practice* by Peter G. Northouse, a popular textbook for leadership classes, presents a skills approach to leadership that reflects parallels to the Levitical model. According to the author, the proposed theory of leadership asserts that leadership is a set of developable skills that anyone can learn.[4] In this model, effective administration is broken down into three basic skill areas: (1) the technical, knowledge about specific types of work and activities, (2) the human aspect, those critical interpersonal skills and the ability to work with people to accomplish goals, and (3) the conceptual, the ability to translate the big ideas that shape any organization and its work.[5] As we shall see, an approach to leadership that emphasizes technical skills, learning, personal

[1] Joseph L. Badaracco, Jr., *Leading Quietly: An Unorthodox Guide to Doing the Right Thing* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 1.
[2] Badaracco Jr., 5.
[3] Badaracco Jr., 10.
[4] Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 39.
[5] Northouse, 40.

interactions, and a leader-centered brand is analogous to the priestly model, even though biblical priesthood was an inherited position.

Robert Greenleaf's well-known work on the "servant leadership" model, *The Power of Servant Leadership,* helps put the role of the priest in Israelite religious and social life into a larger context. [6] Servant leaders are focused on community work, problem solving, and possess a deep desire to help others.[7] Their highest priority is serving others. They lead from a sense of sacred calling and vocation, not seeking a quick, one-size-fits-all approach to effective leadership. A number of capacities that Greenleaf advocates to develop servant leadership are particularly relevant for priestly leadership as well: empathy for others, healing relationships and the self, thinking beyond everyday realities towards ideals, stewarding of the mission, and a commitment to serving the greater good.[8]

Bookman and Kahn's book on synagogue leadership, titled *This House We Build,* emphasizes the importance of mission.[9] The authors argue that everyone at all levels of a community should know the mission and see how it shapes their community's actions and work.[10] The mission an organization follows should give a sense of where the community is headed. They cite Leviticus 19:1 as the original vision statement of the Jewish people: "You shall be holy![11]" They also break down the many roles the rabbi plays in synagogue life, reflecting on the multi-faceted, complicated nature of their roles: team leader, a bridge between professional staff and lay leaders, supervisor, convener, pastor, teacher, spiritual

[6] Robert K. Greenleaf, *The Power of Servant Leadership*, ed. Larry C. Spears (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 1998).
[7] Ibid, 4.
[8] Greenleaf and Spears, 5-8.
[9] Terry Bookman and William Kahn, *This House We Build: Lessons for Healthy Synagogues and the People Who Dwell There* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2007).
[10] Ibid., 1.
[11] Bookman and Kahn, 1.

leader, and more.[12] Even this long list is not exhaustive; the priestly model of rabbinic leadership offers even more ideas to unpack.

Jerome T. Murphy in *The Educational Leadership Reader*, cautions contemporary leaders against letting these expectations we hold for our leaders become overwhelming. Leadership is a fashionable topic in the world of business and in education.[13] All of the hype often results in people expecting a lot form their leaders: they should be able to resolve all problems, deal with everything well, connect to everyone in their community, and hold a strong personal vision for their work.[14] Unfortunately, lionizing leadership leads to unrealistic standards for measuring success. The author suggests that organizations need to explore the un-heroic side of leadership. To help leaders succeed, there needs to be an understanding that leaders should listen to other points of view, find ways to name and compensate for their own weaknesses, and find ways to depend on others for help fulfilling their goals.[15] A leader can be responsive to the needs of others while still instilling responsibility in others, something that becomes critical for successful leaders. Looking at the priestly model can offer guidance.

Scholarship of Leviticus

The present project takes much of its theoretical framework from the leadership scholarship listed about, but focuses for Leviticus on the work of Mary Douglas's work, *Leviticus as Literature*.[16] Douglas, a noted scholar, claims that Leviticus is so challenging for

[12] Bookman and Kahn, 212.
[13] Jerome T. Murphy, "The Unheroic Side of Leadership: Notes from the Swamp," in *The Jossey-Bass Reader on Educational Leadership* , 2nd ed. (San Francisco , CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2007), 52.
[14] Ibid., 52.
[15] Murphy, 56.
[16] Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000).

the modern reader because it is one of the few biblical books that has not been studied with the tools that shaped new understandings of the Bible in history. According to Douglas, one needs to make a deliberate effort to avoid reading it as an opaque set of laws for a narrow audience.[17] She illustrates how to expand the reading. As Douglas shows, Leviticus presents a beautiful theological approach that teaches about God's grandeur, unswerving justice, and unfailing compassion – insights that are reflected in the psalms and the prophets as well, that more familiar territory for modern Jews.[18] Contemporary scholars and readers need to reread Leviticus, learning how to transform Leviticus from an ancient, irrelevant manual to a dynamic text that can still inform our understanding of God and Jewish living.

Douglas claims that the first key step in creating a new reading of Leviticus is to read it as a book with its own norms and standards, not to impose on it patterns such as those of Deuteronomy and its worldview.[19] Leviticus and Deuteronomy are two totally different books, with different ways of thinking about religion and the world. Leviticus looks at a theocratic system of social order in which all the institutions, tools, and participants are sacred, whereas Deuteronomy has more national, secular concerns.[20] Leviticus elevates the human body to a cosmic symbol and is not particularly interested the reality of national affairs. The two books also present laws and information about rituals in a totally different way. Deuteronomy presents information with a logical, part-whole relations approach. It starts with the smaller, concrete particular situation and uses that as the basis to draw

[17] Douglas, 12.
[18] Douglas, 12.
[19] Douglas, 13.
[20] Douglas, 14.

conclusions about a greater universal whole in a manner similar to Aristotelian philosophy.[21] This mode can be described as "discursive."

Leviticus, instead, presents its worldview and laws by means of an aesthetic, analogical approach. It maps relationships rather than talks about them. It correlates things horizontally, with analogical things associated with one another based on context. With each new law or ritual, the learner is expected to organize new information within or against the context of prior knowledge.[22] Instead of arguing or presenting more information to justify a law, Leviticus simply fits new laws into existing categories, creating correlations, oppositions and inclusions: impure or pure, holy or ordinary. The rules are built on analogies or parallels: the consecrateion of the priest is similar to the consecration of the altar as well as the purification of person with *tzara'at*.[23] The Sinai experience is reflected in the sacrificial system carried out in the Tabernacle, which was divided into distinct areas with different rules. Both Tabernacle and sacrifices reflected the three-fold structure of Sinai: the summit of Mount Sinai as the abode of God, below it the area only Moses can go, and the lower parts are where the people stayed. That is how Leviticus makes sense of the universe. Everything is interconnected into one composition, with law integrated into behavior and morality, human and animal bodies, and the universe itself.

Inside its concentric circles and parallelisms, Leviticus teaches its core lessons about God's strength and might, the vulnerability of all living beings, the preciousness of life, human weaknesses and evil tendencies, and the covenant with God that protects the people in exchange for obedience.[24] The essential truths of these lessons are conencted to a theology

[21] Douglas, 15-16.
[22] Douglas, 18.
[23] Douglas, 20.
[24] Douglas, 88.

that readers often ignore in their dismissal of Leviticus. Leviticus believes that God is present, close to his people, and open to meeting them where they reside, all important theological insights that can speak to a contemporary audience.[25]

In his translation, *The Five Books of Moses*, Everett Fox presents his own take on similar principles. He suggests that the reader view Leviticus as a book of separations.[26] The laws and system outlined create lines or distinctions around our lived experience and religious practices. The world is divided into ideals of order and disorder, of life and death. Viewed from the Priestly perspective, Leviticus presents a perfect, idealized, orderly system and all the potential ways it can be disrupted.[27] The priests were responsible for managing these disruptions. The system delineated in Leviticus was designed to: provide purification and reconciliation with God, protect the priests, land, and people from estrangement with God, and instill a code of behavior to ensure God's blessings can be enjoyed by future generations.[28] Significantly, the Levitical model also assumes that the system can always be repaired, the disruptions resolved, and order can be restored. It offers procedures for such reconciliation and restoration. The views of God, covenant, life, and ritual described previously have all shaped the creation of a priestly model of leadership, rooted in the book of Leviticus and augmented by other key narratives about the *kohen*'s social and religious roles.

[25] Douglas, 89.
[26] Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses* , vol. 1, The Schocken Bible (New York , NY: Random House Inc., 1997), 499.
[27] Fox, 501.
[28] Fox, 501.

OVERVIEW of *LEADING TOWARDS HOLINESS*

To begin drawing a full picture of the priestly leadership model, the reader will be invited first to deepen their understanding of Leviticus and of the biblical priesthood. Chapter 1: Introduction undertakes this task. Since one the major obstacles for understanding Leviticus comes from its unique and obscure language, I begin by defining the terms. Grasping the technical language of Leviticus is both challenging and necessary, even if, admittedly, less engaging than stories about ancestors or kings. Chapter 2: Defining Key Terms outlines key concepts and vocabulary found in the book of Leviticus. This includes overarching concepts such as holiness and purity, and clarifying the similarities and differences between the different sacrifices the priests offered at the altar.

Chapter 3: Defining the Roles of the Priests continues elucidating the role of the priest. After a close reading of the book of Leviticus with multiple commentaries, I distill the text down to four major roles the priest played in Israelite society. Each is associated with unique tasks and with its own kinds of relationships with the community. I also outline a number of leadership challenges that the priests confronted, especially as they related to navigating the boundaries between public and private life. Chapter 4: Biblical Priestly Leadership Narratives pivots away from Leviticus to the rest of the Hebrew Bible to present two major narratives about two major priests. Aaron and Ezra are considered two of the most important biblical priests. They provide two very different accounts of priestly leadership that are instructive for contemporary rabbinic leaders. Both men deal with conflict, moments of growth, and personal challenges that resonate across generations and offer important leadership lessons.

Chapter 5: The Priestly Model of Leadership illustrates a contemporary model of priestly leadership for use by rabbis in partnership with their congregations. I begin by highlighting the differences between rabbinic leadership and the prototype offered by the priests. Consequently I argue for the relevance of priestly leadership in congregational life today in a number of ways. First, I chose to translate a number of the features of biblical priestly leadership to the modern congregational context. While establishing the key facets of this approach to leadership, I offer a few guiding questions and examples that demonstrate the potential effectiveness of employing priestly leadership principles.

To make this theory explicitly feel like a practical leadership style, the final section of this chapter outlines a number of substantial ways that rabbis can employ priestly leadership in their everyday lives to meet the exciting challenges of their chosen career path. These suggestions are only meant to be the beginning. The goal is that learning about the priest's approach to leadership can allow for personal reflection, gaining new perspectives on leadership questions, and generate new, important conversations between rabbis and their lay leader partners.

The Appendix is added because I acknowledge that many rabbinic leaders may not have the time or the opportunity to read the entirety of this project. To make this analysis of Leviticus through the lens of leadership as useful and concrete as possible, the Appendix offers a mini-curriculum on the subject. It consists of a series of four detailed lesson plans with backup material. Each of these lesson plans introduces one facet of the priestly leadership model. They include text study and guiding questions for discussion related to the implications of these texts for rabbis and lay leaders today. They illustrate a way to study these issues together. The lesson plans also directly reference back to the source chapters I

the earlier sections of the present project, “Leading Towards Holiness.” Consequently, learners can access more details if they choose. My intention is that such crafted lesson plans will effectively help a wide range of communities, rabbis, and lay leaders access the complex material. I also hope that they will consider the lessons of priestly leadership engaging, and that these will instill in them a new appreciation for the style and content of Leviticus, shedding fresh light on the biblical book that stands at the center of the Torah.

CHAPTER TWO: DEFINING KEY TERMS

The Book of Leviticus describes the sacrificial system set at the heart of Israelite worship. The priest played a particular role in facilitating these sacrifices, from preparation to performance and completion. The *kohen*'s role in the sacrificial system typically emphasized proper conduct and correct procedure rather than moral leadership, values, or personality traits. The priest dedicated himself to God and to the offerings made to worship God properly and keep the communal system in balance. To fully understand the Book of Leviticus and the impact of the sacrificial system and the priesthood on Israelite society, one must possess a firm grasp on the priestly vocabulary in the Torah. I will define here briefly the central terms and designations found in Leviticus. Furthermore, I plan to use the Hebrew designations for the sacrifices and other cultic categories such as purity throughout my analysis of priestly leadership. The purpose is to encompass the full meaning of each category and avoid insufficient English translations.

HOLY/KADOSH/KEDUSHAH (קדש)

At the core of Leviticus, most famously in Leviticus 19, lies a charge to be holy: "*qedoshim t'hiyu*". The relationship between God and Israel is defined by holiness, a unique sacred dedication between a people and their deity. Only God could designate a person, place, time, or object as holy.[29] *Kedushah* mainly connotes distinction and separation on the one hand and a unique relation to God the holy one on the other. The *q-d-s* root letters connote anything related to the holy. The equivalent root word in Akkadian, a Near Eastern

[29] Nancy H. Weiner and Jo Hirschmann. *Maps and Meaning: Levitical Models for Contemporary Care*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 29.

language very similar to Hebrew, means both "to purify" and "to consecrate."[30] Almost all of the words with the *q-d-s* root in Near Eastern inscriptions related to religious cultic context or a specific, qualified category of places and people in close relationship with the deity. Holiness is not innate in human beings or in the world according to the ancient Israelite imagination. Holiness belongs to God alone and is the extension of God's nature in the world.

Given the enormous power of God, there is also danger inherent in the holy. Therefore, boundaries around and the processes of approaching it are crucial. Many contemporary readers may find the idea challenging, but coming close to God did not have the same desirable connotation religious thinkers and clergy use today. Instead of seeking intimacy and connection with an imminent personal deity or the divine, the idea of being close to God usually filled the worshipper with awe, coupling amazement with fear and dread. God's complete power and control over the life of the Israelite community, and indeed the world, remained an unquestioned fact. Boundaries needed to be erected to protect the people and the state of the community from accidentally broaching divine sphere, much as today we would place boundaries around radioactive material. Although radiation when used rightly can heal, it can also kill when right precautions are ignored. One primary priestly role was to identify and uphold the proper social and physical categories created by these boundaries.[31]

The sacrificial system, which served to regulate approaches to the divine, contained significant societal consequences. If the priests failed to distinguish between the sacred and

[30] Jacob Milgrom , "The Changing Concept of Holiness in the Pentateuchal Codes with Emphasis on Leviticus 19 ," in *Reading Leviticus: A Conversations with Mary Douglas*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press , 1996), 65.
[31] Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics*, Continental Commentaries (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 95.

the ordinary, the very name of God became desecrated and common. The actions of the priests to uphold holiness affected the entire community and their own state of purity. Their relationship with God, as well as their status, derived directly from the priest's ability to increase protect the sacred and contain or limit the common and the impure.

The command to be holy expands on the first moments of consecration at Sinai, when all of Israel entered into a covenant with God and promised to uphold the commandments and worship God. In Exodus 19:10-24, God tells Moses at that juncture to make a fence around Mount Sinai and prevent the people from approaching the mountain. Furthermore, all the people, including the priests had to purify themselves. Presumably, either the people might break through the barrier erected or God might break out. Either way lives would be lost. Mary Douglas asserts that this is the impact of holiness.[32] The holy object that is not properly protected will break out and a person who is not fully prepared to contact the holy will be killed. The very lives of the people depend on the correct boundaries between holiness and the ordinary.[33]

Although Leviticus definitely singles out priests as uniquely in charge of access to the holy, it also extends holiness in certain passages to the people. Traditionally, scholars divide the book of Leviticus into three parts: 1-16 as the Priestly author (P), 17-26 from the Holiness source (H), and Chapter 27 as an appendix of sorts.[34] When read together, these two first sources offer two distinct visions and parameters for holiness. The Priestly source's point of view asserts that holiness is God's. Only the sanctuary, its ritual objects, and the

[32] Douglas, 146.
[33] Douglas, 146.
[34] Baruch A. Levine, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus* (New York, NY: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), xvii.

priests are holy because of their sanctification (with special anointing oil), according to Leviticus. God could also designate certain time as holy (the holidays, festivals, etc.).

The Holiness author, however, generally dated as later and perhaps even the redactor of P, transforms P's notions of holiness in three key ways.[35] First, holiness becomes something accessible to all the people of Israel, not solely the priests. Second, holiness is not a matter of simply adhering to the regimented commandments regarding the cult. Holiness requires embracing a wide-range of commandments unrelated to the cult as well. Holiness is no longer about only about restrictions. It encourages embracing the commandments and ethical standards laid out teach us about God's own holy nature.[36] What one does in social, economical or ethical realms is just as critical to holiness and to God. Third, Israel as a whole, including priests, enhance the holiness of the community and the sanctuary together in proportion to all of God's commandments. Everyone holds the responsibility for following as many of the commandments as possible and therefore they all together become responsible for upholding the communal boundaries of holiness.

The Israelite people are consecrated as holy to God, and they slip in and out of various degrees of purity. This status of holiness is reflected in the covenantal relationship between God and Israel. Since God was inherently holy, the people Israel had to be sanctified to even approach this sphere. God revealed the law and provided the cult system for people to maintain the covenantal relationship, some of which resembles that between a vassal and a lord. The sacrifices are the tributes of food the vassal brings to honor the lord and that food is to be ceremoniously shared between the people.[37] Furthermore, God defines what fidelity

[35] Milgrom, *Reading Leviticus*, 67.
[36] Milgrom, *Reading Leviticus*, 67.
[37] Douglas, 147.

to the covenant looks like in terms of behavior. The way the conduct themselves in business, personal life, and worship will all be separate and sacred to their God.

Holiness in the priestly systems can also be understood as a sense of wholeness and perfection, a desire to be like God in one's everyday life and actions. A life dedicated to God and the commandments would be the best insurance against impurity and for staying in a state of the pure and sacred as often as possible.

TAMEI/TUMAH (טמא)

Everything in the world, whether holy or ordinary, had the potential to become *tamei*, best translated as "impure" (but often translated as "unclean"). Specific activities and circumstances could make a person, place, or thing *tamei*. Rituals and procedures overseen by the priest could restore them to a state of purity.[38]

Tumah, impurity (often mistranslated as "uncleanness"), has no direct relationship to physical cleanliness or hygiene. It is important to note here that the sacrificial system is rooted in very concrete, amoral notions of purity. Medical metaphors are perhaps the most apt for illustrating the seriousness of purity and the fear of impurity as constant contaminations suggested in Leviticus. Most people today acknowledge that germs exist and understand the serious dangers of carrying infectious diseases. Someone with smallpox or avian flu would violate a real boundary by entering a kindergarten classroom. In fact, we might be justifiably horrified to hear about such reckless, dangerous behavior. Just because germs are not visible to the naked eye does not mean they are not capable of endangering an entire community. This held just as true with impurity in the everyday worship of ancient Israel. Sources of impurity were very real, even if they were not visible. Impurity builds up

[38] Wiener and Hirschmann, 29.

on holy people, objects, and places. It has to be washed off with the rites of atonement.[39] The *tamei* can be set right with a sacrifice of a ritually pure animal in some cases, or washing and waiting until evening, depending on the transgression. The priests held the tension and balance between the fluctuating reality of what is possible in terms of purity and remaining attuned to God's will and the divine in the world. Their role was to supervise and ensure proper rituals to safeguard the community's well being, and God's holiness.

States of purity are a characteristic concern of the priestly author. Sequentially speaking the root word *tamei* in the Hebrew Bible is only used one other time prior to the book of Leviticus: to refer to the rape of Dinah (Gen 34:5).[40] The verb describes the act of physically entering a woman illegitimately, or when the boundaries of Jacob's camp and family being violated; it refers to crossing a forbidden boundary that later describes (forty-seven times) objects, people, and places in a state of impurity in the Tabernacle and the larger Israelite community.

Sharing an enclosed space or tent with someone who is already contaminated can also transfer impurity to both you and the space itself.[41] Later rabbinic commentators sought to elucidate and expand on these notions of impurity but accepted them as fact. They did not question the norms of the system itself. It is important that the modern reader not attempt to read any emotional quality into the language, which is clearly cast in terms of actual time and space (i.e. entering a holy space after touching an impure thing and spreading the impurity).[42] In the biblical mind, boundaries of contact have been violated and the person who has

[39] Douglas, 148.
[40] Judith S. Antonelli, *In the Image of God: A Feminist Commentary on the Torah*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1995), 259.
[41] Christine Hayes, "Cult and Sacrifice, Purity and Holiness in Leviticus and Numbers," Open Yale Courses (Transcription), 2006, http://cojs.org/cult_and_sacrifice-_purity_and_holiness_in_leviticus_and_numbers-_christine_hayes-_open_yale_courses_-transcription-_2006/.
[42] Douglas, 150.

become contagious cannot be permitted to spread the contagion and put others at risk. "Impure" is not a term of psychology, it is a terms of the cult and its rituals. Ritual impurity imposes God's order on all of God's creations, human and animal alike. To be in a state of impurity simply means that one is not qualified to contact the holy. Impurity only truly becomes actualized as a threat to others if one decides to go to the sanctuary. So purity and impurity are states of qualification or disqualification for contact with sancta.[43] The lines between purity and impurity are far more fluid and interconnected than one might imagine. Touching the substances or objects that bring about a restoration of purity can also make the person touching it *tamei*.

The Levitical conception of impurity acknowledges that impurities cannot be avoided. They are a part of the fabric of life itself. Only the passage of time and the use of ritual can integrate impurities caused illness, death, loss, and war into the lives of individuals and the community.[44] Living with this worldview required maintaining a balance between the pure and the impure, as well as ensuring constant access for everyone to the holy, their God.

The task of the priest was to integrate the reality of impurity and restore the boundaries that needed to be there to keep order. Though the boundaries were porous, the priests's work fixed the breaches and restored the community, the sanctuary, or the individual to a state of purity over and over again.

PURITY/TAHOR/TAHARAH (טהור)

Just as everything in God's creation has the potential to be ritually impure, it also has the potential to be pure or *tahor* (in Hebrew). The rituals performed by the priest temporarily

[43] Christine Hayes, "Cult and Sacrifice, Purity and Holiness in Leviticus and Numbers."
[44] Wiener and Hirschmann, 191.

restore the individual, thing, or place to wholeness and purity after defilement. Ritual purity can also be seen as a kind of protection: the *kadosh* people, places and things are protected from profanation and the *chol* (ordinary) is kept firmly out of the realm of holiness.[45] The rites for endowing or restoring purity also elevate the object of purification. Mary Douglas uses the image of a "ladder of purity;" there are degrees of purity within Israelite society. Different people, objects, and spaces could not just be elevated, but utterly transformed into something new, something more pure than before. In Leviticus 8, the priest is anointed with oil and raised above the ordinary Israelite to a higher ritual status and standard of purity.

Later chapters, Leviticus 13-14 provide an important example of how this process of purification worked. The *metzora,* a person with a skin affliction characterized by sores and scabs (often translated as "leper"), was declared impure and forced to leave the boundary of the community until cured of the disease so as not to render others impure. When the skin had improved and healed, the priest performed a multi-part ritual of restoration that transforms the individual. As a result, the individual was no longer reckoned a contaminating person relegated to the margin. Such a person, could be welcomed back into the community fully.

In sum, the degree to which one is fully pure or complete was not static and could be changed through ritual. The ordinary needed to be converted into the sacred and pure constantly. The task of the priests was a dynamic one, constant work of managing and maintaining.[46]

[45] Douglas, 11.
[46] Milgrom, 96.

SACRIFICIAL OFFERINGS

Introduction

The key verb for a sacrificial offering is *qorban*, which means something brought near to God (from the root q-r-v, indicating closeness). Most of the sacrificial offerings found in Leviticus share a few key features in terms of sequence, content, and purpose. The purposes generally fall into a few major categories: (1) sacrifice as a gift to God, (2) as a means of expiation, and (3) as a means of communing with God.[47] Interestingly, a large amount of control and responsibility for sacrificial offerings is given over to the average layperson.[48] The person offering the sacrifice performs all of the initial rites related to the sacrificial animal, including laying their hand on the animal's head. The individual who brings the animal for sacrifice does the slaughtering himself or herself. The priest's role is to bring the blood to splash on the altar and the specific pieces of the animal to be burned up as a sacrifice (Lev. 1:17, 3:16). The sacrifices, depending on their function and structure, were generally shared between three parties: God, the priests and their families, and the person who offered the sacrifice.

Only the *olah* ("burnt offering") sacrifice was for God alone as it was burnt up entirely. The designation of some "most holy" sacrifice (Lev. 2:3, 6:10, 6:18, 7:6) indicated that this sacrifice could only be enjoyed by Aaron and his sons, and then only in the sacred areas of the sanctuary. The rest of the sacrifices in the initial chapters of Leviticus (3-7) usually were shared, with certain portions burnt on the altar and the rest were boiled in pots

[47] John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, vol. 4, World Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: World Books, 1992), lxviii.
[48] Milgrom, 22.

and shared among the priests and donors, and many parts for the people bringing sacrifices could be consumed outside the sanctuary.[49]

Finally, before delving into the main kinds of sacrifices, it is important to emphasize the intentions of the sacrificial system. Some sacrifices were part of the regular schedule of worship, meant to keep God's favor and attention with the Israelite community.[50] The laws laid out in Leviticus dictate that Israelites could not use sacrifices to expiate intentional actions.[51] There was no ritual remedy for these serious violations. In cases like premeditated murder, theft, or adultery (for example) the law deals directly with the offender and serious punishments are meted out. This reflects the ideology developed in the previous books of the Torah. These sins and morality in general are not the concern of the regulations for sacrifice found in Leviticus. Many commentators have noted that Leviticus is indeed silent on the subject of the ideology of the sacrificial system.[52] The "what" and "how" are provided, not the "why." This debate is not the topic of this project. The following sacrifices in Leviticus 1-7 focus on the unintentional actions, thoughts, and misdeeds of everyday life that lead to impurity and the rituals that could restore purity in the community as facilitated by the priests.

[49] Levine, xiii.
[50] Levine, xviii.
[51] Levine, 3.
[52] Harltey, lxvii.

***BURNT OFFERING/OLAH* (עלה)**

Leviticus 1 outlines the rules governing the ordinary burnt offering. This offering is known as an *olah,* which means, "to go up." The name indicates that the entire offering goes up to God and must be totally burnt.[53] The unblemished animal from the herd or the flock serves as an expiation for the person offering it, but the text does not mention how the ritual effectuates such expiation. God apparently desires the *olah* sacrifice and accepts it because of the pleasing odor (*nichoach*) it produces (Lev. 1:9). The Hebrew word *nichoach* most likely derives from the verb *nuach*, meaning to rest, perhaps implying that God will experience pleasure or comfort from this regular daily offering.[54] The priest offers the animal sacrifice as the intermediary between the individual and God. At the altar, the priest becomes the representative of the Israelite and the intercessor. The text also indicates that there was a consciousness of economic issues related to sacrifice. The option of a burnt offering of birds allows the poorest members of the Israelite community the option and ability to offer an *olah* offering as well (Lev. 1:14-17).

***CEREAL OFFERING/MINCHAH* (מנחה)**

The term *minchah* means, "gift." The offering labeled this way actually evolved over time. Initially, it was the name for any kind of sacrifice (see Gen. 4:3-5). It most likely derives from the root *n-ch-h,* meaning to lead or conduct; they were brought before the deity or ruler.[55] The *minchah* offering described in Leviticus 2 consists of flour, olive oil, and the sacred spice frankincense that were brought before God. If one had cooked the cake beforehand, no frankincense would be necessary. The fact that this offering comes

[53] Tamara Cohn Eskenazi and Andrea L. Weiss, eds., *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* (New York, NY: URJ Press, 2008), 572.
[54] Levine, 8.
[55] Levine, 10.

immediately after the description of the *olah* seems to indicate that the two may be related as another sacrifice for expiation and for goodwill. In many Near Eastern cults, the flour-based offering was specifically for the poor person to facilitate their participation in the sacrificial system.[56] A meal offering could be offered alongside an animal offering or stand-alone. Both were offered on a daily basis. The individual bringing the offering would prepare whatever combination of ingredients. The worshipper would then hand it over the priest. Though, of course, this offering belongs to God, only a portion is burnt fully on the altar (Lev. 2:2). The priest would bring that portion to the altar to be burnt up in smoke as a pleasing odor for God (Lev. 2:9). The rest of the *minchah* was given to the sons of Aaron, the priests. This portion given over to the priests is labeled as especially holy of all the offerings by fire made to God (Lev. 2:3). The priests would then celebrate this meal in the presence of God, a common feature of Near Easter sacrificial rites.[57] Failure to eat the offering in the proper time and place would render the sacrifice totally ineffectual.

***SHELAMIM* (שלמים)**

Leviticus 3 describes the *Shelamim*, offering usually translated as peace or well-being sacrifice. This is essentially an offering of thanksgiving. Just as *shalom* in Hebrew indicates a greeting of peace, *shelamim* can also be understood as a sacred offering of greeting to God.[58] Scholarly evidence based on Ugaritic and Akkadian texts indicates that the *shelamim* offering was an animal sacrifice offered to God when one came before God to greet God for the ritual of a sacred meal.[59] Indeed, the Israelite, the priest, and God all enjoyed this meal of fellowship together, and each group received different parts of the sacrifice. The fat and

[56] Milgrom, 25.
[57] Levine, 11.
[58] Levine, 15.
[59] Ibid.

organs of the animal were designated for the sacrifice to God. As a corollary it is here that we learn that the Israelite community is not to ingest any blood or fat from animals (Lev. 3:17). These bodily substances were associated with life and living, and Israelites were not to violate the boundary between life and death set out by God by taking something that belonged to God. The priest ensured that each party had its due, and that thanks and tributes to God were offered properly.

***CHATTAT* (חטאת)**

Leviticus 4 described the *chattat*, often known as a "sin offering," but better rendered as a "purification offering."[60] It specifically removes the culpability borne by individual for their sin, effectively purifying the sinner of their guilt. The *chattat* actually describes two different sacrifices.[61] The first one, described in Leviticus 4:3-21, involved a young bull being offered when the priest or the entire community was guilty of an inadvertent sin. When an individual priest violated one of the commandments, the consequences went beyond him as an individual. Priestly sin pollutes the sanctuary. Unless the sinner offers a purification offering, the entire community is in danger. The choicest parts, primarily the fat and the organs were offered to God. In addition, the priests could consume no parts of this sacrifice. Remaining pieces of the animal had to be be burned up as well from the organs to the skin and the ashes poured out in a pure (*tahor)* place outside the camp. Through this ritual, the priest removed (literally) this unintentional sin, and its consequences of impurity for the community, from the sanctuary to a less dangerous place. In addition, the blood was brought close to the curtain of the *ohel moed*, a unique feature of this sacrifice demonstrating the severity of the situation.

[60] Milgrom, 30.
[61] Levine, 18.

The second *chattat* was mandated if an individual Israelite or chieftain unintentionally violated one of the negative commandments (Lev. 4:22-35), or failed to perform a required duty (5:1-13). These could be of any value from the goat to a bird or even grain. Once the sin became known, the priest needed to facilitate expiation on their behalf and they were to be forgiven.

Leviticus 4 outlines the modifications for the purification offering for the *chattat* at all levels of Israelite society: the priest, the entire community of Israel, the Israelite leader, and the individual common Israelite, with options for the rich and the poor. In all cases, the individual is explicitly held responsible for his violation of the law, but the priest is the only one who can atone for and restore a person's status as a pure and forgiven person in the eyes of God and the community (for now). Such procedures empowered the priest to offer atonement on God's behalf and uphold the spiritual and existential integrity of the community.

***ASHAM* (אשם)**

Leviticus 5 continues on the theme of expiation. An *asham,* often translated as "guilt offering" but better rendered as "reparation offering" (see JPS), actually consisted of a penalty paid in the form of a sacrifice to God.[62] Most of the violations outlined are sins that often emerge from carelessness and inadvertent actions that violate Torah commandments. For example, Lev 5:14-16 discusses those who inadvertently misuse temple property. Lev 5:17-19 describes a scenario where someone may not even know they have done anything wrong and later become aware of their sin. In addition, the person may have sinned consciously at the time but forgot to purify themselves and seek expiation, and they desire to do so later. In these situations and others, the priest is responsible for assessing the value of

[62] Levine, 18.

the reparation and assessing a fitting sacrifice. If goods or money were lost, that amount plus interest must be returned to one's neighbor as well. The individual would then bring the proper animal or the equivalent amount of currency to the priest. The priest could then make expiation for their sin. Only then is the sin eligible for sacrificial expiation.

***KAPARAH* (כפרה)**

While all the previous offerings were to be frequent and could be brought at the same time as part of a single ritual, the *kaparah* offering was a once-a-year event. The *kaparah* offering served as the major event of the year for the priests. In Leviticus 16, the *kaparah* is described as a ritual purification with two parts. First the sanctuary, the holiest physical space in the community, is being purged of the yearly impurity from both priests and ordinary people who brought their sacrifices. *Kaparah* requires that the priest wear special garments made of linen. Aaron as the *Kohen Gadol* is called upon to enter the holiest part of the sanctuary. Only the person who holds this high office can perform this ritual on behalf of all the priests and the people. The priest's body must be purified for this express purpose, potentially washing multiple times throughout the ritual—his body twice and his feet size times.[63] The High Priest restores the sanctuary to a state of fullness and purity. Second, the accumulated sins of the community from the past year are atoned for and they are all forgiven. These sins are transferred by the High Priest, as the symbolic representative of the community, to another living creature: a goat designated as Azazel, and that goat is driven out into the wilderness. Purgation and elimination rites went hand in hand in the ancient world. Milgrom explains, that it would have been inconceivable to destroy an impurity and not try to nullify it altogether.[64] Symbols of evil and impurity were frequently banished back

[63] Milgrom, 168.
[64] Milgrom,166.

to their place of origin or to a place where they could do no harm at all (underground, the mountains, the wilderness, etc.). The purification happens through blood in the second goat sacrificed on the altar. It was seen as such a central set of rituals that the laws and discussion of its technicalities were carefully developed beyond Leviticus and preserved in the Mishnah and Talmud. The designated day for this offering is known as Yom Kippur ("The Day of Atonement"). It stands as the most austere and momentous day in the Jewish calendar.

CHAPTER THREE: DEFINING ROLES OF THE PRIEST

Based on the initial chapters of Leviticus, one could safely assume that the major work of the priests related to sacrifices and the rules of the cult. Moving beyond the first seven chapters and into the rest of the book, a more complex model emerges. With close and careful reading of the Hebrew and making connections across Leviticus, one can actually discern that the priests held an important, multi-faceted role in Israelite society. These functions fell both within and outside their job descriptions as the ritual leaders of the people Israel.

RITUAL ENACTOR

The most essential role of the priest in Leviticus is praxis and supervision of rites and ritual processes. As the priests in God's sanctuary, the *kohanim*'s most frequent daily activities revolved around the sacrifices offered on behalf of the Israelite community. The stringent purity standards designated for the priests and the deep concern for sanctity of the sanctuary were essential for this role. The rituals the priests performed and oversaw brought the mundane to the level of the sacred. They ensured that individuals, animals, objects, and the sanctuary precincts remained pure, keeping the Israelite community in God's good graces. With the completion of each ritual, their actions reconstructed the fabric of society and restored the environment, cleaning the slate as it were (in cultic and symbolic terms) of each Israelite before God, and the upholding the covenant.

Leviticus reminds the reader and the community about the necessity of ritual moments and markers.[65] Rites are powerful ways to undergo and mark transformation. They

[65] Milgrom, 78.

can usher people, places, and objects through liminal moments of uncertainty and transition to create a new, integrated reality. In addition, it is important to note that the priests in Israelite society were not ritual creators or innovators. They enacted a series of prescribed rituals given to them as law from God through Moses. Their performance and supervision of ritual processes came from a sense of duty and respect for proper conduct and as a way of securing the invisible structures and dynamics that sustain life.

We have no indication that the priests had a desire to connect with God personally or create a new way to make sense of the universe around them through ritual. The people received the correct instructions from God, and by performing them correctly over and over again, the priest could maintain the order and purity of his community, society, and the cosmos itself.

The description in Leviticus 4 (4:3-21) of the *chattat* sacrifice offers a number of important insights into the high stakes role of the priest as ritual enactors. The *chattat* sacrifice can be performed on behalf of an individual or the community. In addition, the priest must bring an expiation offering when he has sinned in his role as priest. The *chattat* of the priest is seen as greater because it needs to cleanse a more potent pollution.[66] Misconduct of the priest in his duties at the altar affected the entire community, not just the individual.[67] Carelessness in maintaining the purity of the sanctuary was not acceptable. If the rituals were not executed properly, the relationship between God and the people would be at stake. When the priest erred, he had sinned – not morally but existentially or practically, in that he allows impurities to contaminate the pure and the sacred. Consequently, if the people followed him and trusted in his ability to enact the proper rituals for removing sin, the people were

[66] Hartley, 51.
[67] Levine, 20.

responsible as well.[68] In the schema offered by Mary Douglas, degrees of holiness in the community correspond to the social hierarchy of the people.[69]

An individual's expiation offering is presented in the courtyard before the main altar and any priest can officiate it. The anointed priest (one amongst whom is later designated as the High Priest) offers his *chattat* as close to God as he can come at the curtain for the Holy of Holies. The priest's purification is more extensive because they need to physically purify the entire sanctuary as well.[70] The priest holds a high status in the community and is also a symbol of the altar, so more elaborate efforts are needed to make this ritual effective. Only then can order be restored.

There are two parts to the priest's ritual: the first is the offering to satisfy God, and then the priest performs the riddance ritual to destroy impurity and remove it from the presence of God and the community.[71] In addition, the priests also perform a blood rite, sprinkling the blood on the altar itself. In other versions of *chattat*, the blood is sprinkled on the curtain outside the altar or further away from the Holy of Holies. The priests officiate expiation using blood, the only means in this case of securing God's forgiveness. In cultic terms, *kaper* meant cleansing, a wiping off of the contamination and removing it from the community.[72] For all of the other expiation offerings, the priest offered forgiveness to others as soon as the ritual is completed.[73] In the case of his *chattat,* perhaps they thought it was appropriate for the priest to gain absolution directly from God. The text does not include this aspect in the description of the ritual for the priests. Finally, unlike other sacrifices where the

[68] Milgrom, 44.
[69] Hartley, 60.
[70] Eskenazi and Weiss, 579.
[71] Levine, 21.
[72] Levine, 23.
[73] Hartley, 52.

priests eat a portion, the priest's *chattat* offering is burned entirely on the altar and the ashes are removed from the holy area.

The rules and restrictions for ritual enactment regulated the physical condition of the priest at all times. Ritual garb changed according to the location of ritual and the impact it might have had on the priest's state of ritual purity. For example, the priests occasionally had to remove the ashes of burnt fat from the altar. The ritual of removal (Leviticus 6:3-4) began at the altar, so the priest needed to wear the proper attire and be in a state of purity.[74] The priest would then take off the special garments reserved for the sanctuary precincts, put on regular clothing, and bring the ashes outside of the camp to a ritually clean place there. The change of clothes was necessary to prevent defiling his ritual garments. This ritual of removal demonstrates that all vessels of holiness are connected, from the animals sacrificed, to the space, to the clothing, to the priests.[75]

It is important to remember that the priests were not expected to perform these ritual offerings solely out of the goodness of their hearts for the sake of the community. There were compensations, social and economic. In exchange for their service, God designated certain portions of the sacrifices to be for the priest and his relatives. For most of the sacrifices, the priests ate their portion as a ritual meal within the sanctuary precincts.[76] In Leviticus 6-7, the sacrifices from Leviticus 1-5 are divided into two categories: "holy" and "most holy." The priests were required to eat from the most holy offerings to embody God's acceptance of the offering, consuming the meat or grain themselves in God's presence. The pieces of each sacrifice that were not burned on the altar became the property of the priests and had to be consumed in a holy place. The priests also received the skin of animals. The priests had to

[74] Hartley, 96.
[75] Hartley, 96.
[76] Levine, 34.

know which pieces of the sacrifices belonged to them and carry out the proper rules for eating them with the right timeline. This applied only to the offerings they brought on behalf of the people. Any sacrifices they brought on their own behalf, such as the offering for ordination or for a priest's inadvertent sin, could not be consumed by the priests. They were only compensated for the services rendered to others.[77] When priests made offerings on their own behalf, the portion reserved for them had to be burned up. In a sense, their portion was given up to God.[78]

To fully understand the role of priest as ritual enactor, it is useful to closely examine the ritual that endowed the individual priest with the ability to oversee ritual processes. The ordination of the priests is described in detail in Leviticus 8 and 9. The elaborate rituals described establish the significance of the moment. This day marked in Israelite collective memory the establishment of the sacrificial system and the opening of a pure place for God to dwell.

There were no Israelite priests before Aaron and his sons, so Moses played the role of prophet and priest to ordain his brother and initiate Aaron and his sons into the sanctuary cult. The phrase "As Adonai commanded Moses" is repeated multiple times (8:9, 13,17, 21, 29), conveying that Moses, Aaron, and the community are wholly obedient to God's explicit commands. They are not making up their own rituals or simply following a local custom—this is the word of God.[79]

After washing and cutting their hair, ordination consisted of the formal dressing of Aaron and his four sons in the special linen garments of the priests they would wear to serve

[77] Levine, 34.
[78] Levine, 39.
[79] Levine, 48.

God.[80] These garments received special attention in the Bible, from the initial description in Exodus 28 and 29 to the way they were to be worn in Leviticus 8. The robing of the priest occurred first, and was followed by the placement of accessories on their body. There was no mention of sandals or footwear, suggesting that they would officiate barefoot, conforming to Israelite notions of dress in sacred places, echoing Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush.[81]

A series of sacrifices are offered: a sin offering and a sacrifice for the investiture. Moses performs two rituals involving blood and oil on Aaron's body. In the Near Eastern context, rituals for daubing and smearing were almost always on the most vulnerable part of the body and physical structures to dedicate them to God. Moses took the blood and put it on Aaron's right ear, right thumb, and right big toe and repeats the ritual with each of Aaron's sons. The rest of the blood was sprinkled on the altar. This action was not explained in detail, but one can infer that it symbolized some kind of dedication and purification of the full body of the priest to God.[82] The blood purified the priests and bound them to service to God.[83]

After the sacrifices, Aaron and his sons are sprinkled with oil. The high priest, Aaron, was anointed to show that God's power and favor were with him, enabling him to take on his new roles as teacher and intercessor in the community, which will be discussed in detail later.[84] The high priest is the living counterpart to the altar.[85] Aaron was transformed into a sacred vessel through this anointment.[86] The transformation of his body and role did not

[80] Eskenazi and Weiss, 603.
[81] Levine, 50.
[82] Eskenazi and Weiss, 606.
[83] Levine, 53.
[84] Hartley, 110.
[85] Levine, 48.
[86] Levine, 51.

endow the priest with any additional divine attributes or godly powers.[87] Priests were only sanctified, removing them from the realm of the profane and empowering them to operate in the realm of the holy without any threat of death, contamination, or danger.

The Israelite community also had an important role to play in this holy moment. They served as witnesses to the ritual, watching Moses fulfill the commandment from Exodus 28 to ordain the priests. The community was also symbolically embedded in the accouterments that adorned the priest. On the breastplate worn by Aaron, each tribe was represented using precious stones, symbolizing that the people were a part of the action each time the priest officiates.[88] By being present, the entire community acknowledged the chosen status of the priests. Aaron and his sons were not the only ones who were installed on that day. The Tabernacle was also anointed with oil, making the priests and the objects they use all holy.[89] The additional rite of pouring oil on Aaron's head was noted (Lev. 8:12), making Aaron's ritual slightly more elaborate than for his sons. In subsequent settings, the average priests were only sprinkled with oil after the sacrifices on the altar, and they also had simpler garments than the high priest. Both the ritual for ordination and their garments symbolized priests' status, degrees of holiness, and level of authority before God.[90]

One has to imagine that the transition from layperson to priest was an intense process. Like other transformational rituals, the ordination ritual consisted of a moment of separation, some period of liminal state, and the aggregation of new obligations.[91] Moses instructed Aaron and his sons to stay in the precincts of the *mishkan* for seven days. For the sake of the

[87] Milgrom, 81.
[88] Eskenazi and Weiss, 605.
[89] Ezkenazi and Weiss, 606.
[90] Hartley, 113.
[91] Milgrom, 79.

people, the priests had to stay in a state of ritual purity while becoming holy.[92] After this period of dedication and purification, Moses turned over the conduct of ritual to Aaron by inviting him to officiate at the altar for the first time (Lev. 9:7).

Leviticus 9:22-24 and 9:57-58 describes an additional ritual action that is never discussed again in Leviticus: a ritual of blessing (ברך). At the initiation of the altar, Aaron lifted up his hands and blesses the people. The physical act described echoes the Priestly Benediction ritual performed today, with hands uplifted and a specific formula of blessing recited before the community by *kohanim*.[93] Significantly, it was after Moses and Aaron blessed the people that God's presence came down to dwell in the *mishkan*. In this ritual moment, one cannot help but recall the receiving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Both cases involved the people falling on their faces out of fear and awe at being so close to God's divine presence. Afterwards, the system for sacrificing at the *Mishkan* described in Leviticus 1-7 became formally operational.

Fascinatingly, another ritual process of transformation closely mirrored the transformation of the priests during the ordination ritual: the purification of the *metzora,* an individual with a particular skin affliction (*tzara'at*). Similar to the other rituals discussed in this section, the elaborate purification process for the *metzora* reflected the high stakes, physical nature of purity and its impact on the proper relationship between God and Israel.[94] When the borders of the human body began to crumble, as with the mysterious skin affliction *tzara'at*, the very boundaries of society broke down as well. The ritual process overseen by

[92] Milgrom, 80.
[93] Levine, 51.
[94] Weiner and Hirschmann, 53.

the priest provided a map through the liminal, uncertain moments of disease, eventually restoring order.[95]

The restoration of the *metzora* unfolded in this fashion: The priest had been examining a *metzora* from the onset of the condition by going to the place where a *metzora* was isolated from the camp. When symptoms were cleared in terms of guidelines specified in Leviticus 13-14, the priest task was rehabilitation of the afflicted individual. Outside the borders of the camp, the priest would begin the process of transformation by declaring the person to finally be *tahor*. Seven days later, the priest would offer a sacrifice of expiation on the person's behalf. The previously ill persons would then be given clean garments to put on, with the laundered garments reflecting their pure state. Immediately, the priests would smear the blood from the sacrifice on their right-side extremities, as with the ordination ritual of the priest. These are the only times for such anointing of extremities, placing the newly ordained priest on par with the newly restored *metzora*. On the eighth day, the individual would bring the materials for four sacrifices to God and return fully to communal life. Only then, after the completion of this week of rituals, would the social and metaphysical order of the community be restored.

TEACHER of LAW

Priests were expected to have a deep knowledge of the rituals they performed as a part of their daily tasks. They also needed to have a mastery of law in order to teach others.[96] The instructions were transmitted from God to Moses to Aaron and his sons for the benefit of everyone. They were explicitly told how to protect the holiness of the sanctuary and the

[95] Weiner and Hirschmann, 57.
[96] Milgrom, 260.

community they served. However, the priests and their families did not hold this instruction for themselves. In many Near Eastern and Egyptian cultures, the knowledge afforded to the priesthood was a closely guarded secret.[97] Only the initiated had access to it. The priests of the God of Israel, however, had a specific role as the teachers of God's commandments as well. Leviticus 10:10-11 states, "…you will distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean; and so that you will teach the people of Israel all the laws Adonai has told them through Moses." The Torah states clearly that the instructions are to be shared with the entire people. The priests received God's word through Moses. They carried no new instruction of their own devising; they only transmitted the old.[98] The laws for worship were not part of a hidden esoteric doctrine but they belonged to everyone.

One can detect hints of this teaching role more implicitly in other moments in Leviticus. In Leviticus 6 and 7, the priests were the intended audience (Aaron and his sons specifically) of this particular instruction about sacrifices.[99] Particularly, they were told what belonged to them from the offerings brought by the people. However, these laws were also conveyed to Moses with the people as witnesses. The people thereby received the instruction as well. They were expected to understand what belonged to them and what belonged to the priests, and to understand the societal role of the priests.

This section of Leviticus ideologically asserts an egalitarian approach to holiness. Holiness is a dynamic concept and everyone needed to be vigilant about their own status and purity.[100] The precautions to preserve holiness are for the priest and Israelite alike. This includes being cognizant of areas of exclusion: of non-priests as well as certain priests. For

[97] Milgrom, 96.
[98] Milgrom, 96.
[99] Milgrom, 62.
[100] Milgrom, 178.

example, Leviticus 21 presents requirements for the bodily holiness of the priest, including a discussion of the impact of blindness, deafness, abnormalities, or disfigured limbs Therefore, knowing about the physical defects that lead to disqualification for service in the tabernacle were not the exclusive concern of the priests. Moses explained these limitations and requirements to Aaron, his sons and all the people of Israel (21:24). Knowledge became responsibility. These laws became the concern of all of Israel. The appearance and abilities of the priest were the responsibility of the people.[101] Presumably, if an Israelite were to see these laws being violated in any way, they could correct the infraction for the sake of the community. The priests were accountable to God as well as the people because of their critical role in connection to maintaining holiness. If impurity was not expunged quickly and effectively, it could lead to the very destruction of Israel.[102] Therefore, as the receivers of all Torah, the entire Israelite community needed to make sure the prohibitions and restrictions imposed on the priests were upheld. The priests had a role in making this information available.

Even the laws that applied to the entire community were handed down to Moses and Aaron first, who were charged with instructing the community on the content later. For example: Leviticus 11 outlines the laws for *kashrut*, animals permitted for Israelite consumption. God began by telling Moses and Aaron, commanding them to speak to the Israelite people and convey to them these food laws (11:1-2).

God assigned the priests their task of both themselves distinguishing between the pure and the impure and of teaching Israel to distinguish between the pure and the impure (10:10-

[101] Milgrom, 267.
[102] Milgrom, 262.

11).[103] The priests taught the people to make these distinctions in their everyday life, not just when they brought offerings. The need to maintain certain levels of ritual purity distinctions affected their home life and domestic affairs as well. The home then became yet another arena for holiness to be present.

There were no explanations as to why particular animals are regarded as ritually pure ("*tahor*," often mistranslated as "clean") and others are not. Some of the excluded foods were commonly disliked in the ancient world.[104] Others were not. An important explanation comes from Mary Douglas. She asserted that the analogue of the altar was the body of the Israelites, each of us a microcosm of the tabernacle.[105] From the point of view of Leviticus, the table, the people who come to share the food, and the animals slaughtered for eating are all under the same ultimate law of holiness, designated by God. Therefore each individual was responsible for knowing the laws of purity for animal consumption and slaughter, just as the priests needed to know the laws of purity for the Tabernacle. Both sets of laws protect the worshipper from contagion and prevent further endangering impurity.[106] The priests instructed the people in these laws for food, accounting for every animal and maintaining the Israelite community's holy status.

COMMNUNAL HEALER

The priests were mostly concerned with rituals and laws related to worship of God. One can therefore say that they were always in the role of healers, facilitating the reconciliation of community and God and restoring to fullness the fabric of society.

[103] Eskenazi and Weiss, 624.
[104] Eskenazi and Weiss, 624.
[105] Douglas, 138.
[106] Douglas, 139.

However, one particular ritual process placed them in the role of community healer even more directly and explicitly. Chapters 13-14 of Leviticus present a rare biblical discussion at length of diseases and their management: the skin affliction *tzara'at,* usually translated as "leprosy."[107] Most modern scholars, however, reject the translation of *tzara'at* as leprosy.[108] The symptoms do not match and no current equivalent has been identified, so I will use the Hebrew term in my discussion: *tzara'at* for the disease and *metzora* for the person afflicted. *Tzara'at* can be defined as a radical illness, an illness that hits at the heart of our meaning in the world.[109] Rachel Adler asserts that it makes and unmakes us; it erodes the body and one's very sense of self.[110]

By his interactions with the *metzora*, the levitical priest entered into a uniquely intimate relationship with the afflicted individual, a relationship that focuses on accompaniment, witnessing, and boundary crossing.[111] The word ראה appears over thirty times in Leviticus 13, indicating to the reader that the pastoral role the priest fulfilled had to do with seeing and sight.[112] The priest received a report, either from the individual or someone else in the community, of a scaly affliction on the body (13:2). If a particular discoloration turned white or the affliction spread, the priest would see it and pronounce it impure (13:3 and 13:8). Sight leads to action. The head and any hair on the head or face were subject to the same scrutiny (13:29-31). Skin discolorations, burns, and bald spots are also examined as well. If the criteria for diagnosis are not met, then the person remains pure and

[107] Weiner and Hirschmann, 56.
[108] Weiner and Hirschmann, 59.
[109] Rachel Adler, "Those Who Turn Away Their Faces: Tzaraat and Stigma," in *Healing and the Jewish Imagination: Spiritual and Practical Perspectives on Judaism and Health* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2007), 143.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Weiner and Hirschmann, 54.
[112] Weiner and Hirschmann, 55.

can remain in the community (13:6, 13, 23, 28). They saw, examined, diagnosed, watched, reported, and restored the person to a proper state of purity.

Although the priests were intimately involved with illness and its implications for the community, they were not curers. They did not bring medical or miraculous cures to *tzara'at* or any other illness.[113] In the Hebrew Bible, only God and certain prophets could bring healing to the sick. The priest did however provide context and meaning as well as guidance for coping that ultimately led to a healing of the person's purity and their status in the community.

Leviticus 13 describes the different skin diseases that the priests had to deal with; it instructs the priest how to distinguish between those that were *tzara'at* and those that were not.[114] Scholars have taken different approaches to attempt to understand what *tzara'at* meant in the Levitical view of the world and why it, alone among diseases, is the focus of such restrictions. Jacob Milgrom proposed that *tzara'at* was an aspect of death.[115] The symptoms appeared on the body and the detailed process for purification indicates that it had some kind of ritual implications. Milgrom notes that the disease contaminated people and buildings like a corpse (by virtue of proximity), and there are many similarities in the prescriptions for purification, including use of animal blood and fresh water.[116] The disease, according Milgrom, then, connoted bodily decay.[117]

Mary Douglas saw that *tzara'at* represented a breach of the body's limits by impurity.[118] Anything that was atypical coming from the body, including skin disease and

[113] Weiner and Hirschmann, 58.
[114] Weiner and Hirschmann, 59.
[115] Weiner and Hirschmann, 60.
[116] Milgrom,135.
[117] Weiner and Hirschmann, 61.
[118] Ibid.

discharges, were *tamei.* Thought it was a manifestation of impurity, Douglas emphasized that *tzara'at* was not thought to be attributed to the victim's sins or morality.[119] The stigma of the disease came from its breaching the purity of the community and the priest needed to ensure that the boundaries were maintained.[120]

In any case, the steps for dealing with *tzara'at* required the priest to be present, aware, and discerning. First, he had to examine the permutations of the disease and decide the next steps. There were several conclusions the priest could draw: (1) the person could be declared *tahor* and thus did not have *tzara'at* any more, in which case the person could be isolated for week and checked again to make sure before being restored; (2) if the diagnosis was not clear or if clearly infected still, the person could be declared impure and checked again at a later point until the condition reaches a non-contaminating stage (this did not mean a complete physical elimination of the impact of the disease; scars and other signs could remain without being regarded as polluting). The text does not tell us exactly where the person was isolated, but it is likely he or she was taken outside the camp, as the rabbis of the Talmud conclude.[121] The story about a group of persons so afflicted support this conclusion for the biblical period (see II Kings 7).

The *metzora* was required to perform three actions that indicated their impure status: rend their clothes, make their hair unruly, and move to reside outside the camp. When the priest declared that a person was *tamei*, they immediately had to perform the tearing of the clothes and messing their hair. They had to call out publicly, "*Tamei! Tamei!"* while covering their upper lip, making their impure status publically known and protecting others from contamination through unintended contact. The person with *tzara'at*, second in

[119] Douglas, 185.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Weiner and Hirschmann, 63.

impurity only to a corpse, acts out many of the rituals associated with mourning and death.[122] Mourners are also traditionally required to wear torn clothes, go about with unshorn hair, and to isolate themselves to some extent. The only difference, as Rachel Adler points out, is that *metzora*'s social death had an indeterminate timespan and the mourner's social death is time-limited from the start.[123] These actions removed the individual, temporarily, from social interactions with other people and from the sacrificial rituals for worship that allowed the people to draw near to God.[124] The individual then entered into a cycle of examination and quarantine in which the priest was the chief mediator and partner.

Every seven days, the priest went out to examine the *metzora* and check their progress. As a result, the afflicted person never went through the path to healing alone. The priest was there to check in, provide guidance about the next steps, and ensure they were restored fully to the community and to God. Though not explicitly stated, perhaps the priest even visited throughout the seven-day cycles.[125] Although the major rituals took place at the onset and the end of the skin disease, the priest was there in between as well to accompany each person physically and emotionally through what undoubtedly was an isolating, lonely process. The priest could never simply be allowed to abandon the person indefinitely, but had to check regularly, at least once a week. The *metzora* had the priest even when they were cut off from their family, their tribe, and from God. The priest was responsible for the wellbeing of the *metzora*, and for healing the relationships with the community and with God. As noted earlier, the final stage of dealing with the *metzora* was the ritual of purification upon re-entering the community. In a manner that echoed the ordination of the priests, the *metzora*

[122] Adler,153.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Weiner and Hirschmann, 64.
[125] Weiner and Hirschmann, 64.

underwent a purification ritual with sacrifices, washing, and anointing that established his or her complete restoration in terms of purity. The ritual marked the former *metzora*'s re-entry into the community (see Lev 14:1-32 and pp. above).

The priests' intimate witnessing, their capacity to see (ראה) in ways the others could not, gave them a critical role to play. Though the healing they provided was a religious act of purification[126], the priests also provided for the human needs to be noticed and to find meaning. It is easy to imagine just how the priest's continued presence and consistent attention made the process of healing somewhat more bearable for the sufferer.

INTERCESSOR with GOD and PEOPLE

In many ways, the priests in Leviticus and throughout the Hebrew Bible are in-between figures. They are intercessors on behalf of the people with God and also communicate what God desires and commands to the people. In other Near Eastern cultures, demons and other evil forces were blamed for contaminating the sanctuary.[127] In the Israelite system, humans were fully responsible and therefore a human figure was needed to prevent the pollution of the sanctuary as much as possible. The biblical text asserts that God cared about the keeping of the sanctuary and the proper execution of rituals.[128] If these tasks were not performed to the letter, they risked God's wrath and even God abandoning God's people and the sanctuary. Contamination and impurities were perceived as physical and real, much as we today regard viruses as real powers even though most of us do not see them. The priest was required to prevent or mitigate impurities and the danger they pose, and keep the sacrificial system operating to do so. According to Leviticus 1-17, holiness was lethal to all

[126] Milgrom, 133.
[127] Milgrom, 43.
[128] Levine, 20.

but the priests.[129] The priest was the only person who could officiate expiation and offer God's forgiveness to people who sinned.[130] Only the holy individuals designated by God to perform this role could communicate between the two sides.

Priests were both a part of and apart from the people they served. In the priestly version of the world, God would not ordinarily speak directly to individuals, as is the case in other biblical narratives. It does not appear that ordinary people could simply pray for forgiveness and be restored in the Levitical priestly system. In certain situation, the priests' actions were not sufficient. For example, in Lev 5, persons had to rectify their relations with others first. But the final stage of restoration, i.e., atonement, was the work of the priests. The priests' special dedication to God through their ordination gave them the unique ability to go between the sacred and the ordinary. So only they could effectively intercede on behalf of the people to God through ritual sacrifice in certain situations. For others, it was far too dangerous and foreboding an endeavor. Leviticus 8:6 says that Aaron and his sons were to יַּקְרֵב (draw near), which shares the same root as קרבן: the priests were presented in some fashion as a sacrifice themselves, brought to altar to be totally sanctified to God.[131] When Leviticus 6 presents the portions of the sacrifices the priests were to receive and consume, it teaches the people about their critical bond with the priests.[132] They needed to provide the food to sustain the priests as designated by God because the priests assisted them in approaching God. The priests' service to God benefitted everyone.

[129] Milgrom, 64.
[130] Levine, 22.
[131] Eskenazi and Weiss, 604.
[132] Hartley, 96.

UNHOLY PROBLEMS: PRIESTLY LEADERSHIP, LIFE, and FAMILY

Based on the strict instructions and clear rituals outlined in Leviticus 1-9, one could safely assume that up until that point, the sacrificial cult of ancient Israel offered priests a routine, clear job with little variety. Rules were comprehensible and unambiguous. If the priest did his job well, maintained the boundaries between the sacred and the profane, and kept the fires burning, all would be well in Israel. Leviticus is not known for its particular pathos and drama. However, Chapters 10 and 21 of Leviticus force us to confront some unexpected human elements of the priesthood. With men of flesh and blood serving at the altar with their own intellect, free will, relationships, and emotions, matters were bound to go awry and provide certain challenges. Indeed they did, with extreme consequences for the individuals and the community.

Leviticus 10 begins with Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, offering an *eish zarah*, a strange fire, to Adonai (10:1). For this offering, which they were not commanded to bring, they were instantly incinerated and killed (10:2). Just a few verses beforehand, God's presence came down in a fiery blast to dwell among the people, and then suddenly God destroyed with the same fire two ordained priests for their sins. In another parallel, sins having to do with fire (brought in their pans) are punished by fire as well.[133] At the height of exaltation, the people were stunned by a spectacle of doom from God.[134] The event was so shocking and important that it became a marker of time in Leviticus and Numbers (the only other such markers are Lev. 16:1, Num. 3:4 and 26:61).[135]

[133] Milgrom, 94.
[134] Nehama Leibowitz, *New Studies in Vayikra (Leviticus)*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: The World Zionist Organization, 1993), 119.
[135] Leibowitz, 119.

Why would these two ordained priests bring this offering? What is this terrifying story doing in Leviticus in the first place? Generations of rabbinic commentators have attempted to infer some answers, but each is somewhat insufficient.

The *midrash* from Vayikra Rabbah suggests that Nadav and Avihu died because they drew near, brought a strange fire, and did not consult one another.[136] Each man acted on his own initiative when it came to sacrifices. Ohr HaChayim's eighteenth century commentary states that the offering itself was not the core issue. Nadav and Avihu violated the boundaries of the innermost chamber by coming in unprompted, and from this the reader is meant to learn that violent, obtrusive bids for closeness to God are rejected and come at a great cost.[137] Moses Mendelssohn asserts in the Biur that overabundant joy and enthusiasm are the issue.[138] They try to force an inappropriate relationship with God for their priestly role and they forget the rules. The Biur further asserts that God was so harsh with Nadav and Avihu precisely because they were so holy and sanctified. They were held to higher standards and a different relationship with God. These commentaries bring up some interesting points and provide helpful perspectives for the reader; but they offer little that might comfort Aaron and his surviving sons who are left behind to deal with their grief.

What is clear from the text is that the privileges of the priesthood cannot be abused under any circumstance. Ultimately, God will protect the sanctity of the sanctuary with extreme measures, even when it means a loss of life. The priests were anointed, and their work of sustaining holiness should have been their highest priority. Though they had some ability to take initiative, clearly Nadav and Avihu crossed the boundaries of the priestly role by not offering proper sacrifices. Offering something God had not commanded (10:1)

[136] Leibowitz, 120.
[137] Leibowitz, 122.
[138] Leibowitz, 123.

threatened the balance of the system, which in turn threatened the entire community. In typical Leviticus fashion, the text is concerned with the procedure and the "how" of the violation, but not with the "why" or the moral dimensions of their actions.

Just when the sudden violence of this moment could not be any more shocking, what happened next was even more troubling. Moses explains the death of Aaron's sons through a cryptic message from God: "This is what Adonai meant when He said: Through those near to Me I show Myself holy, and gain glory before all the people. And Aaron was silent." God affirmed God's total sanctity and the awe of the community.[139] Aaron fell silent in the face of this vague explanation, and after Aaron's relatives took the burned bodies of his two sons away, Moses forbade Aaron and his remaining sons from observing any mourning rituals personally (10:6). This silence echoes loudly, contrasting with the people shouts in Leviticus 9:24.[140] Aaron's silence was not just an absence of crying or wailing. It also suggests some kind of resignation, or perhaps shock and dismay. No further explanation is offered and we are left to infer the feelings behind it.

Though Aaron's family of priests cannot mourn publicly, in a beautiful act of support, Moses tells them that the entire people of Israel will observe the mourning rites on their behalf (10:6). Aaron was responsible for keeping the sanctuary operating and maintaining his own purity at all costs. He was not even allowed to leave the precincts of the *Mishkan* in the middle of his workday to mourn his sons (10:7) at the risk of violating his purity and sanctity. It would seem that for the first time the text presents the mutually beneficial relationship between the priest and the community acted out from the people's side. The people took on

[139] Milgrom, 94.
[140] Milgrom, 95.

the public rituals of mourning for Aaron's family so they could remain pure and keep them in a state of purity before God.

God took the opportunity to convey a further set of instructions immediately after this incident. Leviticus 10:9-11 states:

> "Drink no wine or other intoxicant, you or your sons, when you enter the Tent of Meeting, that you may not die. This is a law for all time throughout the ages, for you must distinguish between the sacred and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean; and you must teach the Israelites all the laws which Adonai has imparted to them through Moses."

The priests must never become intoxicated or lose control of their faculties when they come to officiate. In addition to offering the sacrifices properly, they need to be able to distinguish between the different categories of purity and holiness under their domain. The priests were responsible not just to themselves in their decision-making. It affected all of Israel. These high stakes were directly related to their role as teachers of the law in the community. This "law for all time" prevented the priests from conveying the laws of sacrifices incorrectly or bringing more people into danger of mismanaging their own purity. The message of the text once again reads loud and clear: the public role of the priest and their positions vis-à-vis the community must override all other considerations.

This strange tale concludes just as oddly as it began. In Leviticus 10:16-20, Moses chastised Aaron's two surviving sons for failing to eat the meat of the purification offering in the sacred precincts. Moses became upset because they alter the procedure without permission. This insubordination seems to be indicative of something else going on underneath the surface.[141] Would these priests be able to eat, part of their job description, after all that happened to them? Rashi imagines that Moses lashes out at them to spare Aaron

[141] Leibowitz, 135.

from any more grief.[142] Maybe Moses feared that the other sons would die too and he loses his temper in frustration. Aaron manages to win the legal argument by reminding Moses that they did offer all the sacrifices, but perhaps God could understand today, after all that happened, why they would not eat (10:19). His words seem to imply that God surely would not see this as fitting! Aaron's justification is couched in his newly acquired role and knowledge of the sacrificial system. Moses is placated and reverses his stance on their infraction, implicitly with God's approval as well.[143] With this, Leviticus leaves behind the drama of the priestly family for now and returns to legal literature.

The lessons of Leviticus 10 parallel the content of Leviticus 21, the chapter that deals with the roles and restrictions on the priestly family. The priesthood described in Leviticus is hereditary, limited to the descendants of Aaron and their male progeny.[144] The priests must know the laws and live by them at all time, lest they pollute the sanctuary. Chapter 21 opens by asserting that the priest may not defile himself by coming into contact with a corpse and mourning for anyone, except for their closest blood relatives: parents, children, and siblings (21:2-3). Strangely, the wife is not mentioned as immediate family, so the mourning rituals for a spouse are difficult to parse.[145] They are prohibited from observing any mourning rites that violate the holiness of their bodies, including cutting parts of their beard or cutting their flesh. They must remain holy to God because they play such a central role in the social-religious system of Israel: they make the offerings that keep Israel in God's good graces.

[142] Leibowitz, 137.
[143] Leibowitz, 98.
[144] Milgrom, 260.
[145] Hartley, 348.

Mourning with forbidden rites would render them ineffective as priests.[146] Their profession comes first.

For the anointed priest (later called the High Priest), the restrictions are even more severe. He is the most holy to God among his peers, and he may not go near any corpse (10:10-12).[147] His responsibility to God surpasses any family responsibilities. He is even forbidden from leaving the sanctuary, perhaps to avoid the temptation to mourn in addition to avoiding physical transference of impurity.[148] To place this in a larger context, death is a central issue that any religious system must tackle and explain.[149] While many cultures around Israel venerated death, for the cult of the God of Israel, death was seen as the ultimate defilement. Death needed to be relegated to the ordinary (*chol*) and a barrier needed to exist between death and the sanctuary.[150] Therefore the priests needed to uphold these boundaries, just as they did in every other aspect of Israelite life and living.

The women of the priestly line, though they were not permitted to serve at the altar, were also subject to a number of restrictions, specifically around sexual conduct and marriage. The lineage of the priest was carefully scrutinized.[151] Protecting the priest's line and their reputation was essential, particularly when it came to guaranteeing priestly paternity.[152] Leviticus's concept of purity includes the concern with contamination by proximity, so sexual purity was extremely important for the wives and daughters of priests. Women looking to marry a priest would have to be a virgin preferably, not have been divorced, or have been a prostitute; she could be a widow, though (21:7). Premarital sex was

[146] Hartley, 348.
[147] Milgrom, 262.
[148] Hartley, 349.
[149] Hartley, 347.
[150] Hartley, 347.
[151] Milgrom, 264.
[152] Eskenazi and Weiss, 728.

out of the question for daughters of priests.[153] If she defiled her father the priest through such an act, she would be burned to death to cleanse her family (21:9). For the anointed priest, the restrictions are even more stringent. He may only marry a virgin and she must be a person from his own kinsmen (21:14).

Finally, the priest must be physically whole to serve at the altar. The priests embody external holiness by presenting flawless bodies. The text employs the Hebrew word *tamim*, which means "whole" or "unblemished."[154] A priest could not be blind, lame, have malformed or broken limbs, or have any kind of illness or deformity. These limitations may have to do with the physical effort demanded by the work itself, given what it takes to offer sacrifices. But more may be at stake, especially since the offerings themselves (in the case of animals) had to be likewise without blemish. Interestingly, though a priest cannot serve at the altar with any handicaps or deformities, they can eat from the priestly portions of the sacrificial offerings.[155] The only restriction is that they cannot eat the food in the holy precincts near the altar. This was to prevent them from being near when sacrifices were offered.[156] They are still a part of the priestly clan and not excluded from the privileges of that position. One was not forced into poverty or hunger because he cannot fulfill the prescribed role from God. The hereditary nature and privileges of the priesthood were maintained, with certain restrictions to protect the holiness of the sanctuary and the community.

[153] Milgrom, 264.
[154] Hartley, 349.
[155] Hartley, 350.
[156] Levine, 146.

CHAPTER FOUR: BIBLICAL PRIESTLY LEADERSHIP NARRATIVES

The descriptions of priestly duties and qualifications in Leviticus only provide us with a partial picture of what it meant historically to be a priest and a communal leader. A number of narrative texts in the Hebrew Bible that focus on the lives of significant *kohanim* give us further insight into approaches to priestly leadership as the Bible perceives it.

The life of the first *kohen,* Aaron, is described in detail from Exodus, before his dedication to God as a priest, through Leviticus, and Numbers, ending with with his death (Numbers 20:22-29). His leadership provides an example of a man who was both holy and ordinary, who made mistakes and still remained an important, respected communal figure.

Sixteen generations later, after the return from exile, Aaron's descendant Ezra leads the people back into the land of Israel and offers in his narrative another version of priestly leadership. Ezra takes on a new agenda in the community, bringing the people back into a renewed relationship with God. Both men served as priests, but they also served God as partners in the liberation and restoration of their people. Ezra and Aaron face immense leadership challenges, including anxious crowds, shifting power dynamics, and tests that even the most seasoned leader would find overwhelming. Their words as well as their actions bring the complicated reality of the priestly role to life for the reader.

AARON

Aaron is first introduced in Exodus 4. Aaron is the middle son, three years older than Moses and younger than Miriam. Other than that, the text reveals very little about his early beginnings or his personal life without Moses. He begins his leadership journey as a helper

and foil for Moses. When God tells Moses to go to Egypt to speak before Pharaoh to free his people, Moses staunchly protests. He has absolutely no faith in his ability to carry out this task. In particular, Moses states that his lack of public speaking skills will prevent him from effectively presenting God's decree (Exodus 4:10). Though God assures Moses that he will have all of the support and miracles he needs to succeed, Moses stubbornly resists. God then appoints Aaron as Moses' proxy and identifies him as an eloquent, well-spoken man who could complement Moses (4:14). God says, "I will be your mouth and his, teaching you both what to do (4:16)." God instructs Aaron to go meet Moses in the wilderness and he obeys (4:27). Aaron's first actions are of obedience to God.

In his initial act as spokesperson, Aaron is able to speak to his community directly to convince them that Moses' words were true and that God indeed would bring about their liberation (Exodus 4:29-31). As an outsider, demonstrating miracles would not be enough. Moses alone would not have had the clout to bring the people to his side. Aaron, who had spent his life among these people, spoke God's words and persuaded the elders of the Israelites to follow Moses. With the distinct combination of actions, signs, and words, the two brothers could begin leading the journey towards freedom together. The biblical author also begins to offer us some hints about Aaron's family and its future significance as the priestly line. In Exodus 6, he is identified as a Levite and his wife is named, Elisheva, from the tribe of Judah. The couple has four sons: Nadav, Avihu, Eleazar, and Itamar, men who play significant roles as the first generation of ordained priests.

At this point in the beginning of their story, Aaron and Moses work together, side by side, to liberate the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. Throughout Exodus 7-10, God addresses Moses and Aaron simultaneously with instructions for approaching Pharaoh,

enacting the Ten Plagues, and preparing the Israelites to escape Egypt. When Aaron strikes his staff into the Nile, the water turns to blood (7:20). He brings for the gnats from the dust of the earth, covering the Egyptian people and animals (8:17). Though Moses is clearly the primary prophet and has more direct communication with God, Aaron's role remains significant. He helps lead the people out and works with Moses, sharing the role of teaching the rules of God and overseeing rituals. They stand together in the face of a nation that responds to them with constant moaning and whining, and somehow manage to keep them plodding forward towards the Promised Land.

Exodus 17 describes Aaron most literally taking on his role as Moses' supporter. In the wilderness, the Amalekites ambush the Israelites and engage them in battle. With Joshua, Moses' future successor, leading the troops as a general in the field, Aaron climbs up a nearby hill to watch the battle with Moses (17:10). When Moses arms and his staff are outstretched, they are victorious; but when they fall, the Israelites begin to lose. To ensure the Israelite victory, Aaron and Hur find a stone for Moses to sit on to allow him to rest, and each man holds up one of his arms, encouraging the Israelite warriors forward (17:12). With this support, the Israelites emerge triumphant, and it would not have been possible without Aaron's quick thinking.

During their journey through the wilderness, Aaron makes a grave leadership mistake that, as many scholars have pointed out, somehow does not seem to thoroughly spoil Aaron's legacy. Exodus 32 presents the Golden Calf narrative, a notorious tale of rebellion and moral failing. In the shadow of Mount Sinai where they recently committed themselves to God's covenant, the Israelites start to become restless. They are still in the early stages of

developing their relationship and bond with God.[157] Furthermore, the narrative opens with a leadership crisis.[158] Moses has been up on the mountain with God in a fiery cloud, and the people have been without their visible, tangible connection to their deity for some time. Moses has not told them how long he will be gone, only that Aaron will be available for consultation when necessary (Exodus 24:14). Aaron becomes the de facto leader without his usual partner. The people come to Aaron with a demand that he "make gods to go ahead of us" (Exodus 32:1). With their God and their prophet missing in action, the people command Aaron to take care of this task and assuage their anxiety.[159]

Aaron responds with a short, unreflective answer. His solution is that all the people should bring their gold ornaments and earrings, including those of their children and wives, to him (32:3). He proceeds to melt down this vast amount of gold and deliberately fashion it into a golden calf (32:4). The people see it and declare it to be "your god, O Israel" while Aaron looks on (32:5). Seizing on the excitement and enthusiasm of the people for this new visual for God, Aaron declares a feast for Adonai the very next day and oversees offerings made to Adonai as the people eat and drink, a sort of inverted echo of his later official role as God's ordained priest. With the vacillation between the people and Aaron throughout this story, there remain some ambiguities as to which parties exactly are responsible for what, but Aaron clearly facilitates these actions.

When Moses comes down from the mountain after appeasing God's wrath, he confronts Aaron angrily about the egregious sin he had supervised. When Moses asked Aaron what had happened, Aaron "spins" his version of the tale ever so slightly. In Aaron's

[157] Susan Darr Buell. *The Characterization of Aaron: Threshold Encounters in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers*. Ph.D. Diss., (Baylor University, 2012, PDF), 37.
[158] Buell, 41.
[159] Buell, 51.

retelling, the blame for everything that happened rests squarely on the people (32:22). When they gave Aaron their golden jewelry, Aaron claims he merely threw it into the fire and out popped the calf (32:24). Furthermore, Aaron tries to implicate Moses as well by stating that the people's rationale for such terrible choices came from Moses' absence (32:23). Moses rallies the people to fight in God's name, and the text comments that the people had become out of control because Aaron allowed it to happen (32:27-28). In short, in this infamous episode of the Golden Calf, Aaron chose to pacify the people over doing the right thing and following God's commandment.[160]

The sin of this calf cost thousands of Israelites their lives, with the Levites leading a mob to enforce God's justice; surprisingly Aaron emerges physically unscathed. In the end, the blame for the calf rested mostly on Aaron's shoulders (32:35) because he enabled the people and allowed it to happen. We might say that even if Aaron acted out of fear or impulse, he demonstrated that he is not a leader ready to fully accept the consequences of his actions.[161] Yet, he remains dedicated to God as an ordained priest in Leviticus 8-9, and permitted to be the chief ritual leader of Israel, overseeing proper worship to God.

Immediately following his official investment as the anointed priest, Aaron experiences the first leadership that challenges him simultaneously as a private person and as a public official. The great joy and celebration of their community abruptly transforms into a time of shocking loss and grief. Leviticus 10 recounts the strange, sad story of Nadav and Avihu, Aaron's two eldest sons, recounted in more detail in Chapter 3 (pgs. 33-37). This experience of traumatic loss undoubtedly shaped him and became a threshold moment in his life. He found himself commanded by God to continue his priestly duties and put the needs

[160] Buell, 63.
[161] Buell, 75.

of the community over his own private emotions and needs. Even as he does so, Aaron shows himself to be man of dignity as his silence masks his emotions. He is also a leader of strong opinions and a sense of justice, arguing back when Moses critiques Aaron and his surviving sons for forgetting a minor detail of a sacrificial ritual right after they just lost their sons and brothers.

Aaron's leadership challenges continue in Numbers 12. Aaron and his sister Miriam publicly gossip and speak against Moses because he married a Cushite woman (Numbers 12:1). In addition, they challenge Moses' authority over the two of them, declaring that they too have been leaders throughout this journey in the wilderness. They therefore demand their own honor. By contrast, Moses is described as the most humble man on earth (12:3). He does not react or protest his siblings' words, but God intervenes on his behalf.[162] Aaron and Miriam are both chastised by God verbally, but only Miriam is punished physically with "snow-white scales (12:10)." In this narrative, far from acting as Moses' partner and supporter, Aaron gripes about Moses' prophetic status and recognition. It is not clear who the audience is but presumably it was anyone who would listen. God insists that Moses is unique and trusted at an unprecedented level, and God's anger flares up against these two. It is not clear why Miriam is the only one to suffer physically for this bold, brash action, although the Hebrew implies that she was the leader in this protest ("And Miriam spoke, and Aaron also…" Numbers 12:1). However, Aaron does plead on his sister's behalf. He confesses that they are both responsible and asks Moses to intervene with God to save her (12:11-12). In this case, Aaron is willing to admit his responsibility, even if it may have been too little too late. He has compassion for his sister and acts upon it. God is not persuaded to heal her immediately, but she is readmitted to the camp and healed after seven days (12:15).

[162] Eskenazi and Weiss, 859.

After facing some challenges and questions in his own leadership role, Aaron is targeted in the rebellion against Moses, instigated by their kinsman Korach in Numbers 16-17. Korach publicly comes forth with the crowd he has rallied and proclaims that Aaron and Moses have gone too far in their holding power and authority over the community (Numbers 16:3). The entire community is holy, not just Moses and Aaron. Moses reprimands the rebellious sons of Levi—they have already been set aside for service to God, and now they would seek the priesthood (16:10). He asks, "Who is Aaron that you would rail against him?" Aaron did not ask for this role; God gave it to him and that is not for others to question. To prove God's word is law, Aaron becomes a symbolic participant in a contest before God. Aaron, representing God's legitimate choice and already a holy man, will offer incense alongside Korach and his company and the victor will be indicated by God (16:16-18).

After the earth swallows Korach and his ban and fire consumes 250 rebels and their incense pans, Aaron's leadership must be further sanctified and reassured by God in the midst of this rebellious, dissatisfied community. The disgruntled continue to challenge Aaron and Moses, even as they both plead for compassion from God's wrath against the Israelites (16:22), and Aaron offers expiation sacrifices to stop a plague against the people for their sins (17:11). Aaron literally puts his body between the dead and the living. He is the only man with the power to do this, using the proper sacrifices, eventually stopping the plague (17:13).

God settles the matter of Moses and Aaron's leadership once and for all with a final miraculous act. God commands all of the tribes to place a staff in the Tent of Meeting, including one for Aaron for the staff of Levi (17:16-18). In the morning, Aaron's staff has sprouted almond blossoms, signifying his chosen status. God commands that this staff that

helped liberate the people from Egypt be placed in the Tent to dissuade the people from further rebellion (17:25). With this test, Aaron's leadership can hardly be questioned again. And God speaks directly to him to affirm his dedication to God and the altar.

The physical symbols of his leadership play a critical role in this part of the narrative, sending a message from God to the people. Furthermore, Aaron demonstrates his absolute obedience to God, as well as a willingness to intercede for the people even when they are at the lowest and rebel against him and God yet again. He shows significant evolution from the Aaron we saw in Exodus 32, who might have acted quite differently in this tense situation.

Ultimately, in Numbers 20, Aaron is finally punished alongside his brother Moses in what must have been a very painful way: one hasty act means that both men are forbidden from entering the Promised Land, the place they had dedicated their entire lives to reaching. The story begins when God instructs them to speak to the rock to bring water forth and, instead, Moses strikes the rock (20:8-11). God explains that "…because you did not trust in me, so as to cause me to be regarded as holy by the people of Israel, you will not bring this community into the land I have given them (20:12)." The "you" is plural. The passage is difficult in that the precise nature of the crime is not altogether transparent, and the punishment seems to far exceed any such obvious crime. Nonetheless, in the incident of the water and the rock, their actions are claimed to have demonstrated that they did not trust in God; they failed to affirm God's sanctity in their public roles when the people pushed, doubted, and questioned. God decides to end their journey before entering the land. In sum, both men are punished for their mistakes, both for this most recent incident and perhaps from over the past forty years. Their time of leadership is drawing to an end and will officially be passed down to the next generation, Moses to Joshua and Aaron to his son Eleazar. God

instructs Moses to usher Aaron through his death, bringing him up to Mount Hor where he will be gathered to his kin (20:6). Aaron does not plea for forgiveness or raise any protest.[163] The transfer of power for leading the priesthood consists of the formal investing of Eleazar in the garments of the anointed priest. Once his son wears these garments, he takes his father's place as the ritual and cultic leader of the people and Aaron breathes his final breath on the mountain (20:28).

When the community sees that Aaron has expired, they mourn for him for thirty days. They wail for him, just as they did for his two eldest sons in Leviticus 10 (20:29). This communal moment indicates their love for him as a leader, in spite of everything. Aaron's death is a significant loss for the community, even if he was really Moses' second in command and he was not the primary leader. Something about the qualities he brought to the leadership role he did have. He had the unique authority to officiate at the altar for the people and represented holiness being the head priest. But he also demonstrated other, more personal qualities: his compassion, pursuing peace, or something else that now was sorely missed. His story has its ups and downs but overall his legacy is a positive one for the Jewish people. He is venerated as the first priest. He was a trailblazer. In later Jewish interpretive tradition, he is known as a man obedient to God, a pursuer of peace, and a complicated leadership role model. He was a man who made mistakes as he learned what it really meant to lead, to teach, and to be responsible for the lives of others.

[163] Buell, 162.

EZRA

Generations after the death of Aaron, entering the Promised Land, ruling the land, and going into exile, the Israelite people entered an era of priestly leadership. Ezra, whose biblical book recounts his journey leading the people back to their land, presents the people he led and the reader today with a new type of *kohen*. The year (according to biblical calculations) is 458 BCE, a crucial time in the life of the nation as it sought to reconstruct itself after exile. His focus as a leader was to study and teach the laws of God. The text states this explicitly: "For Ezra had set his heart on studying and practicing the Torah of Adonai and teaching Israel the laws and rulings (Ezra 7:10)."What had been a relatively minor part of the priestly role in Leviticus' conception of priesthood becomes the main focus for Ezra. He utilizes his family pedigree and social capital to teach the laws and enforce them, persuading the people to buy into the project of living God's *torah* along the way.

The book of Ezra meticulously establishes Ezra's family line, making clear the legitimacy of his leadership in the community. Ezra 7 lays out his genealogy, taking the reader all the way back to Aaron, the very first anointed priest (7:5-6). Ezra comes from the very best priestly stock, and his credentials would have given him clout in the community. Clear continuity is established between the leadership of Aaron and Ezra. In addition, Ezra is described as a skilled scribe (7:6). He did not simply take notes in meetings. As a scribe Ezra was more like a critical secretary, holding key documents and including the letter from King Artaxerxes authorizing him to teach *torah* and the *torah* of Moses itself.[164] Literacy and knowledge gave him power in the community. Above all, he served the Torah and God, not a particular administrator. Although the temple was standing and the priests were still

[164] Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah*, Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 62.

supervising sacrifices, Ezra himself was invested in making the Torah accessible: interpreting it for the people and probably writing the scrolls and then teaching their holy words.[165] His leadership was a combination of an inherited role he received from his family and a skilled profession he needed to train for and work to perform. He was not a warrior or a prophet.

Ezra came up from Babylon as a part of a migration of the Judeans who had been exiled earlier. They began to come to Jerusalem at the behest of Cyrus, the Persian emperor at the time (Ezra 1:2-4). The entire narrative of Ezra-Nehemiah maintains a singular emphasis on the community, specifically listing all the people who came (Ezra 2).[166] The list began with prominent lay people then moves to priests and temple servants, emphasizing that they are the focus of the story.

As Ezra-Nehemiah tells the story, King Artaxerxes invested in Ezra real legal authority over the community. He charged Ezra to appoint judges for Judea to oversee the region, and gave him full permission to teach the law of his people publicly (Ezra 7:18 and 25-26). Furthermore, Ezra served as a proxy for governmental authority. He could do whatever he chose, even severely punishing violators of the law.[167] Ezra carried out the mission from the king he was given, but he chose not to overstep his power or abuse his position. In fact, he never depended on royal authorization. Instead, he used persuasion and example. He truly remained focused on his educational and spiritual role, strategically employing his power later for the benefit of the entire community.

Ezra also took the opportunity to broaden what leadership and responsibility look like in the community. Surveying the people assembled in Ezra 8 to help bring vessels and gifts to the temple, he noticed that they have *kohamin* and Israelites, but no Levites represented

[165] Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 62.
[166] Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 48.
[167] Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 65.

(8:16-18). The tribe of Levi as a whole has been set aside for their service to God and the Temple; the priests, or *kohanim*, are one part, but the rest of the Levites also have designated roles. Ezra made sure that they had the opportunity to be included as he reestablished the structure of the community.[168] He delegated and recruited, not because he had to but because he knows that strategically it will be beneficial in the long run to broaden the base of leaders.

Ezra also used his ritual role strategically. When they set off for Jerusalem, he publicly sanctified to God the chosen leaders, priests and Levites alike, and highlighted the importance of their roles (in this case taking charge of wealth and the gifts dedicated to God) (Ezra 8:28). He clearly demonstrated that everything they have and everything they will have as a community derives from God's blessing, not from their own merit. But he did even more: he empowered others to realize their unique and sacred opportunities and obligation. Ezra remained the key leadership figure but he made space for everyone else, including the priests and the Levites, to be treated with respect.

In Chapter 9, Ezra recounts his first challenge and crisis he faced as a leader that was at the very core of the nature of the community.[169] He saw that the Israelites were marrying local women whose practices resemble those of the proscribed early Canaanites. Instead of decrying their behavior directly or chastising the people with threats, Ezra makes use of ritual (Ezra 9:4). He publicly mourned from the afternoon until the evening. Ezra prayed before God in a central public location, praying out loud so the entire community can hear what he is saying. He employed collective language, crying that we have all sinned and we are not worthy, uttering words of a sincere confession. Everyone, including himself, has violated God's teaching, he says, and Ezra begs for mercy and forgiveness for everyone. When the

[168] Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 67.
[169] Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 68.

people saw this, they had a visceral, emotional reaction. They realized the veracity of Ezra's words. Many repented, wept, and charged Ezra to push them to live in accordance with the law (10:3-4).

Without force, the people concluded that Ezra was right and his emotional prayer moved them. He modeled the process for finding forgiveness and redemption with God without explicitly stating his objectives. After offering his prayer and his message, he left it to the people to decide what would happen next. His leadership and integrity persuaded them and together they decided what should happen to rectify the situation. Some other leaders of the community make an oath and a covenant to rid themselves of their foreign women and their offspring (10:6).

The leaders and officials convened the entire community in Jerusalem to address the situation. Wet from the cold rain and shaken by their fear, they stood together and debated next steps. Only then did Ezra assign blame to the people and finally call them to repent right away and act (10:11). The delegates gave a counter-offer, negotiating from their own place of power. Due to the weather and the timing, they suggested that they needed to form a committee to investigate the situation locally, and develop a concrete, case-by-case process (10:16). Ezra did not push back or unilaterally take over. He accepted their decision and agreed to help carry it out.

Ezra reappears in his role as priest and teacher of the people in the book of Nehemiah, the governor of Judea who ruled during Ezra's time. This section of the Bible reads like Nehemiah's diary of his efforts to reestablish Jewish communal and ritual structures in the land of Israel. In Nehemiah 8 Ezra is called by the title the Ezra Ha-Sofer, Ezra the Scribe, as well as the priest. He is known as a guardian of Torah law. The people invite him to read

from the scroll of the Torah (8:1-3). On the first day of the seventh month, the day currently observed as Rosh Hashanah, Ezra reads aloud from the Torah (8:4-8). When he stands up on the platform to read, others stand with him, men who can understand and explicate the Torah to the rest of the community. Including other teachers when only he alone was invited is a hallmark of Ezra's leadership style. He redistributes privileges and responsibilities so as to broaden leadership. He aims to disseminate knowledge not keep it to himself, and he employs the help of his community to do so. The men who do so are named explicitly and remembered for this honor. These verses describe the custom of a public Torah reading, lifting the Torah, blessing the people and responding with "Amen", practices that Jewish communities still follow today.

When Ezra, the Levites and the others who share the podium with him read and explain the Torah, the assembled people begin to weep. Perhaps they are simply overcome with emotions at the magnitude of the day; perhaps they realize they have not kept the laws of Moses and the Torah. Yet again, instead of condemning them, Ezra, together with the other communal leaders tell the people not to cry. As the priest and scribe, Ezra will help them mend their ways and engage in repair. The book of the Torah that he teaches is the guide.

The very next day, a study group gathers around Ezra to learn more about the contents of the Torah (8:13). From their own study, they discover that a key festival is coming and that they need to prepare by building Sukkot, booths. Ezra apparently trains the people in the study of Torah and its customs, and as a result they uncover for themselves the rituals they need to perform.[170] He does not take on that burden for them or do the rituals on their behalf. After this, Ezra no longer plays a role. In the chapters that follow the community

[170] Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 99.

shows how well they are learning. The community vows to care for the Temple and follow Torah, and through study, an educated elite emerges that can teach Torah and educate their families and neighbors about their history and traditions.[171]

Ezra offers a new paradigm for priestly leadership. Blending his inherited post with his skills and knowledge, he acts as a leader who is educated and comfortable with the text. He is deeply seeped in the Torah so as to open it up and teach it to the people. Instead of telling them what to do next or preaching his own interpretation, he enables the people to take responsibility for the Torah of their own accord. Ezra's model expands the vision of what it looks like to be a priest beyond the cultic emphasis, and includes learning and interpretation as the highest priority. He infuses a level of democracy into communal leadership that previous priests had not. While the majority of people in the Israelite community could not offer proper sacrifices to God, every single person had the capability to learn Torah and implement its teachings in their homes and lives. Under his leadership, the tradition becomes something that everyone holds responsibility for, and the expectation of study helps guide the people, women and men (Nehemiah 8:2-3), into a new chapter of their history in the land of Israel.

[171] Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose*, 101.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE PRIESTLY MODEL OF LEADERSHIP

Overview: Rabbis and the Priestly Leadership Model

The biblical Tabernacle, the *mishkan* in the wilderness that priests were meant to oversee, is long gone. The First and Second Temples in Jerusalem, official centers of Jewish worship run by the priests, are long gone as well. It would be easy, therefore, to dismiss the leadership of the priests, the *kohanim* as ancient relics of an outdated, irrelevant system. So too could one leave the book of Leviticus behind, the priestly manual for holiness and leadership, and treat it as a museum artifact.

Priests in the Bible and down to the first century CE, held some of highest leadership position in general and were in charge of Israel's most sacred institution. Today, the Jewish world predominately relies on rabbis, cantors, and other Jewish professionals as leaders. Millennia separate modern leaders from the priests of the Bible. They are truly worlds apart from their priestly predecessors. For one, there is no inherited element to the rabbinate; anyone born into a rabbinic family is not automatically qualified to serve. Any person with the necessary qualifications can train to become a rabbi and be ordained if they fulfill the requirements. Furthermore, rabbis are accountable to those who hire them for their job security, while the priests derives their authority from, and were answerable only to God. In addition, a rabbi does not work within the same understanding of holiness found in Leviticus. The priest had to constantly track and repair the physical and symbolic boundaries of the holy and the ordinary; sacrificial offerings were the main mode for connecting with God. Rabbis, instead, focus on other modes of worshipping God, mainly prayer, and holiness is a

far more metaphysical, spiritual matter. Different concepts of sin, purity, and relationship with God inform their leadership as rabbis.

So why study priestly model of leadership in Leviticus and beyond? The answers emerge when we explore the dynamics, details and frames of reference that shape the priestly models. Consequently, with the obvious differences in mind, current Jewish clergy still have much in common with their priestly ancestors as central venues for a community's understanding and practice when it comes to the holy and to a relationship with God. Accordingly, the texts that describe priestly leadership in the Bible offer significant wisdom for rabbis as they approach their sacred work. The fact that moderns think of the sacred somewhat differently only underscores (as we shall see) the value of engaging the ancient priests.

The priest and the rabbi both hold multi-faceted and complex leadership roles. They are expected to lead, officiate rituals, heal breaches, set an example for others, and inspire the community towards a higher ideal. In addition, both are teachers on a communal level. As leaders, both the rabbi and the priest are seen as integral parts of their communities but are also in exceptional positions that set them apart. Typically, their positions of religious leadership mean that they are held to a higher standard. The boundaries of their position and expectations of behavior presented to them as leaders provide rabbis with a number of challenges akin to those faced by the priests. All public, religious leaders have to grapple with questions around public role and private life, and the biblical rules for the *kohanim* provide some interesting insights and tools that rabbis might gleam wisdom from today.

This chapter presents a model of priestly leadership relevant for 21st century rabbinic leaders. The major elements of this approach to leadership will be outlined in detail, drawing

on contemporary leadership literature as well as examples from Leviticus and the rest of the Hebrew Bible. In addition, I will consider the implications of the priestly leadership model in terms navigating clergy-lay leader relationships. Finally, I will present a number of practical applications for this leadership model and recommend circumstances where priestly leadership strategies might be most useful for today's synagogues and their leaders. My goal is to help communities see how ancient biblical texts, even a difficult one like Leviticus, can continue to be a part of on-going, vibrant Jewish life.

Key Components of the Priestly Leadership Model

Holding the Vision in the Face of Reality

Priestly leadership invites current Jewish leaders to challenge a trend prevalent in contemporary leadership literature. Most books on leadership provide strategies for initiating significant organizational changes or detailed models of leadership that leaders can consult to transform their own leadership style. The priestly approach to leadership has a different focus, namely leading within the world as it is. According to Zionist philosopher Ahad Ha'Am's well-known essay "Priest and Prophet," the priest does not seek revolution to establish a new paradigm; the priest does not fight for a specific, uncompromising vision of a moral world.[172] Instead, the priest perpetuates the vision a society holds of itself and tries to bridge the gap between reality and the ideal. Priestly leadership focuses on upholding the highest ideals a community has established for itself while rooting any potential changes in reality.[173] A priestly leader holds a realistic vision of what can be in his or her community,

[172] Ahad Ha'am, "Priest and Prophet," trans. Leon Simon, in *SELECTED ESSAYS BY AHAD HA'AM* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1912), , http://www.archive.org/details/cu31924079589242, 130.
[173] Ha'am, 131.

and works to integrate cherished values into already existing ways of operating. They are responsible for reminding the people of the vision they strive toward, and helping guide them towards new ways of realizing that same vision.

Referring back to Leviticus, the priest was responsible for upholding the vision of holiness that God had set out for Israel. Through ritual sacrifices, the priest ensured that the community could remain in close relationship with their God. Expiating sins and restoring purity for individuals and the larger nation was a major component of their activities. Furthermore, holiness came with inherent dangers to the people. Part of the vision for a holy society came with the need to set boundaries. The priest served the people and God by guarding these borders and categories, and by making sure that unavoidable crossings were managed so that the basic pattern and the persons themselves were preserved unharmed.

If the people violated those boundaries, or purity was unintentionally not upheld, individuals were not considered a lost cause or severely punished in the priestly system. Even priests were known to make mistakes in their work. In the path towards holiness, Leviticus acknowledges that we all might stray away from the vision God set out for us. The same individuals might come back again the next day or the next month with the same admitted sin. Therefore there was no limit to the usage of these mechanisms for expiation and restoring holiness. Leviticus and the priests were protective of the orientation towards the ideal so that the road to it continued to be available. Just as the vision remained the same, the opportunity to strive towards holiness was always guaranteed.

Robert Greenleaf's theory of servant leadership asserts that one characteristic of successful servant-leaders is a capacity for conceptualization: the ability to dream big dreams

and hold a vision up for people to follow.[174] Priestly leadership calls on the leader to dream and conceptualize what it would look like for the community to be the best version of itself. They do not lead only for their own self-interest, but they steward the communal vision and hold it in trust for the people. For the Torah, this might have meant following the commandments or enacting certain rituals properly to worship God. For our contemporary Jewish communities, in addition to upholding core Jewish teachings, our leaders can hold us accountable to the standards set up for specific communities. Such standards might be found in a synagogue mission statement, an organizational statement of values, or other similar documents. The leader who holds the people accountable to their mission can better help the community assess the alignment between the real and the ideal on a regular basis.

Healing Relationships, Guiding with Compassion

Priestly leadership also provides the leader with the opportunity to step into the priestly role of healer. In every Jewish community there are incidents that bubble up to the surface, and that have a negative impact on communal life. Perhaps one individual broke the trust of others, or the entire community experienced a sudden loss or violent attack. The priestly model designates the leader as the person most suited to facilitate a process of healing.

Leviticus 13-14 illustrates this concept directly. When an individual had any kind of skin affliction, which made him or her a *metzora*, they came before the priest for diagnosis. The priest's first task was to correctly identify the situation in front of him. Was this a rash that met the diagnosis of an impurity? Did the matter require some deliberation and a second

[174] Robert K. Greenleaf, *The Power of Servant Leadership*, ed. Larry C. Spears (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 1998), 7.

look? Could this be a minor matter that the person could manage individually without priestly intervention? Once the priest had a clear picture of the problem, he could act accordingly. If the person did indeed need to leave the community in order to heal, the priest facilitated a process laid out by law.

It is critical to emphasize again that while the priests entered into an intimate relationship with the *metzora* and was involved in overseeing their healing, they were not the ones expected to cure disease. They bore witness to the individual's suffering. When a person was isolated, the priest took care to facilitate re-entry and rehabilitation. During the time when the condition called for isolation, the priests never left the person to deal with their disease alone; they checked in on the person and told them what to expect next at regular intervals. When the time came, they guided the person through a process of purification that allowed them to reenter the community and be restored with dignity to their family, tribe, and community.

Contemporary Jewish leaders have the opportunity to do the same. They can sit with people who have made mistakes, or have the potential to harm the community, and they can be their compassionate guides. The leader can offer them an intentional way back to their place in the community as in Leviticus 14 (see pp. 44-49); and if it is appropriate, the leader can show how to obtain forgiveness ad make the necessary steps to make amends, as with the biblical *asham* (reparation) offering.

Another feature of the servant leadership model consists of the ability to heal relationships and a desire to heal oneself. Robert Greenleaf wrote in his essay, "Servant as Leader," that most clergy and other leaders who deal with human emotions and experiences

do so out of a desire to find healing.[175] Between the servant and the community, seeking wholeness is a shared endeavor. Even leaders and professionals sometimes need to find their own restoration. With the *chattat* (purification) offering, we acknowledge that leaders can inadvertently endanger the entire community and that specific channels need to, and can, exist for them to heal themselves with God's help.

The priestly leader is also imbued with the power to oversee larger moments of transition. Often, this means helping their people heal from conflict and loss within the wider community. Like the *kohanim* in Leviticus, the leader cannot be the one who does the work for the person, or for the community that needs to be made whole again. There are no magical cures or solutions provided. What the leader does provide, however, is a roadmap for acknowledging conflict or challenging situations, and a way to work towards repair of relationships. Later, when a faction of Israelites challenges Aaron's leadership (Numbers 16-17), he prays to God to spare them from harsh punishment, and he advocates for compassion, even though they are threatening his power. At one point, he physically protects the people from destruction and carries out the proper procedures to return the people to holiness in God's eyes (Numbers 17:13). When leaders are prepared to deal with ruptures and heal wounds, they can do so with great compassion and remind others of the bigger picture. In doing so, they can create communities that move forward from strife, and that are able integrate losses of trust or faith into the shared communal narrative.

[175] Robert K. Greenleaf, "The Servant as Leader." 1972. www.essr.net/~jafundo/mestrado_material_itgjkhnld/IV/Lideran%C3%A7as/The%20Servant%20as%20Leader.pdf.. PDF.

Democratizing Knowledge

Just as the priests were responsible for the knowing the laws and teaching them to the people, priestly leadership calls on the leader to share responsibility for sacred knowledge with the entire community. Leviticus 10 states that the priest had two duties: to use their knowledge to distinguish between the holy and the profane, and to teach the laws of holiness to the people. By openly sharing this knowledge, the priest was not alone in his obligations. Individuals could be responsible in important ways for maintaining their own holy status, leaning on the priest to provide the necessary rituals for purification, the aspect of holiness they were not permitted to handle on their own.

To understand another mode of sharing knowledge, it is useful to refer to the narrative of Ezra's priestly leadership. In Ezra 9-10, Ezra confronts a communal crisis by drawing other leaders into the problem-solving process. Though he has the option to make unilateral decisions on behalf of others, Ezra sees that this tactic will not generate buy-in. His next step after resolving the immediate challenge is to provide the community with tools to monitor its own actions. In Nehemiah 8, he reads and teaches them *torah*. Moreover, during his public reading of the *torah* scroll, he asks other people in the community to help explicate the material even though he could do it himself. He empowers others to take on the role of teacher alongside him. Nehemiah 8:13 then reports that after publicly reading the Torah of Moses for the community, a group of leaders in the community want to learn more. When they approach Ezra for help, he leads them in the study of the law and enables them to discover through their study that the next major festival on the calendar is coming up. The people next use their own newly acquired knowledge to ensure the proper rituals are observed, and in the next chapter, Ezra literally disappears from the narrative.

The story continues by portraying a community that now can access the teachings of the *torah* thanks to Ezra, and the people then vow to do everything they can to protect their traditions and follow God's ways; and they do it on their own initiative. They do not rely on a single leader to push them through the motions without any personal investment. The story of Ezra the priest models how lay leaders and priests both work together to realize their goals, and continue to learn and be better as a community. They are not changing direction radically or creating something entirely new. The community that returned from exile in the Ezra story uses its new Jewish knowledge and shared power to create and sustain a society that reflects the ideals of their core texts. How they go about it models an effective processes and goals for today.

Priestly leaders today have a similar opportunity to empower their communities by encouraging them to learn. A community need not rely exclusively on the leader for complete authority in areas of Jewish living and ritual. A priestly leader does not just teach their community what they need to know as the need arises. He or she teaches them proactively the core and complex foundations of the tradition, as well as how to learn and uncover new ideas or application on their own. Furthermore, drawing on the model of servant-leadership, the priestly leader is concerned with the effect learning has on the community. The leader's efforts to teach should shape the lives of the individuals who are now answerable to this new information. Do those served grow and benefit from what they've learned?[176]

Ideally, community members are empowered to continue to study and learn, reassessing their goals along the way. Consequently, the leader shifts from an active role of ownership over teaching to one of supporting from the sidelines. Priestly leaders train others

[176] Greenleaf, *The Servant as Leader*.

to share some of the roles, especially that of education. Ezra disappears from the scene in the biblical narrative because he taught others to study and teach. The people could do for themselves what they were never able to do before. His leadership strategy echoes the Iron Rule employed by contemporary community organizers: Never do for others what they can do for themselves. Lay leaders that are empowered feel ownership over their communities and believe in their own ability to enact change.

In addition to knowing about Jewish practice and pursuing Jewish learning, contemporary Jewish communal leaders can also take ownership over the mission of the community. If the priestly leader is the one who holds the people accountable to their mission, everyone in the community should be able to understand the implications of the mission in their own lives.[177] Lay leaders and rabbis alike should make sure that organizational mission drives their shared decision-making process and that other members of the community can see how their leaders' choices reflect the community's vision for itself.

Valuing Deep Relationships, Acknowledging the Limitations

Another aspect of priestly leadership that requires explication is the value placed on interpersonal relationships. Due to the priest's many roles, he was often privileged to have an up close and personal relationship with ordinary people. To do their job properly, priests had to deal with bodily functions, illness, and moments of weakness. The *kohanim* saw service in this constant human chaos as a part of their sacred duty. As far as one can tell from the text, the people accepted the intimacy of the priest's role and looked to the priest for guidance on matters of holiness and purity in the private corners of their lives. Other matters were left to other communal leaders.

[177] Bookman and Kahn, 3.

Priests were not meant to be all things to all people. Most people would not even qualify for the position. Other individuals like the prophets, the warriors, and the tribal elders, fulfilled different functions. Shared spheres of leadership were present and areas of specialties, as it were, respected. With their combined leadership, the community was able to grow and flourish.

Priestly leadership encourages the leader to play a set of prescribed roles in the community and rely on others to do their jobs as well. The joint leadership of Moses and Aaron is an example. From the beginning of the Exodus narrative, Moses and Aaron work as partners to lead the people out of Egypt. While Moses is certainly the primary actor, he needs Aaron's talents and communal clout to successfully bring the people to believe that God is with them. Moses communicates directly with God, but Aaron plays a key role as the person communicating God's words to the people, or carrying out God's instructions. Centuries later, when Ezra becomes the major leader of the community returning to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon, he could have kept authority and knowledge to himself, do it all alone, but he chooses a different approach. He makes sure that all of Israel's important clans and classes have a role to play in reestablishing their community's worship and governance. And he helps train them, including future leaders, for their mission.

In exchange for their service to God, the people in Leviticus provide for the priest's needs, even in challenging situations. Interdependence is acknowledged and the expectations set out in these relationships allow the priestly leader and their community to rely on one another in important ways.

In Leviticus 1-6, the text clearly lays out the portions of the sacrifices that are set aside for the consumption of the priests and their families. After burning the proper parts of

an offering for God, the people's offerings would be divided up among the priests and, in some cases, the worshipper. *Kohanim* had no other major way of earning income since they had to remain holy and their calling was to serve God. The laws were made clear to both the people and the priests, and both sides were responsible for understanding and carrying out God's instructions in this area.

The rigorous priestly role also resulted in tension between private, personal needs of the priest and his professional and communal role, and imposed certain constraints on the priest. Aaron's experience as the first *kohen* also reflects in many ways some of these dynamics between the priest and the community. When God killed his sons Nadav and Avihu, Aaron the father is silenced. God declared that Aaron and his other sons, as priests, were not permitted to mourn. Being the officiating priests, they had to stay within the precincts of the sanctuary and continue their priestly duties. One can only imagine how difficult that must have been for the father and brothers, having to manage their grief while continuing in a role of public service. This story highlights the importance of acknowledging the tension of the public and private obligations of the priests. When officiating, in this case at the altar, the private needs of Aaron as a father are placed on hold, secondary to his job as chief priest and intercessor between community and God. He is clearly a priest before parent. In another situation, perhaps where the stakes were not as high for the community, this may not have occurred.

On this occasion, Moses and the entire community decide to step in and show support for their leading *kohanim* by performing the public mourning rituals on their behalf. When the priestly role keeps Aaron and his sons from going through the rituals that follow loss, the community takes on the responsibility for them. Moses and the people demonstrate that their

holy leaders can rely on them for comfort when they need it. The support will be there as the priests continue their professional roles in service to the community in difficult circumstances.

Priestly leadership also allows the leader to acknowledge openly some of the messier hardships of serving others. As much as the leader is a part of the community, he or she is also held to a different set of standards. Often, these standards are higher or more stringent than the ones the community would set for themselves. When the priest made an inadvertent error in his work, he had to offer a *chattat* (purification) sacrifice. The best parts of the animal were all burnt up completely and the priest was not permitted to eat of their own offering. Whereas the priest could offer expiation for the rest of their community, he could not benefit from his transgression. And only God could offer forgiveness and restore his status.

The *kohanim* were restricted in many aspects of their private life where an average Israelite would be able to freely choose. A *kohen* could only mourn for his immediate blood relations. Contact with all other corpses was unacceptable justification for polluting themselves and the sanctuary. The chief priest could only marry a woman who had never been married, and other priests as well had restricted options regarding wives (Leviticus 21). A priest's daughters were expected to remain pure before marriage as well. Any sexual misconduct by the woman of a priestly family defiled the entire family and had serious consequences for everyone involved.

Different standards of acceptable behavior are a reality that many Jewish leaders often struggle to accept and deal with in their professional lives. Even though they are participating in creating Jewish community, their title of "rabbi," and their service to the

community in a professional capacity, set them and their families apart. Pressures abound on all sides, from expectations about the rabbi's personal Jewish practice to the behavior and role in the community played by the rabbi's partner and children.

The community and its lay leaders often hold these expectations subconsciously and only have the best of intentions in offering advice. In reality, they usually have no idea of the effect it can have on their clergy, from feelings of discomfort and shock to outright anger. Rabbis are left on their own to navigate personal pressures and tough emotions while continuing to serve the community and be a resource for others. Congregants and lay leaders often need to do their own work to understand the rabbi's experience, or challenges need to be pointed out to them before they can cultivate empathy for their rabbi.

Priestly leadership provides the opportunity to acknowledge the everyday stresses of communal life on both ends. This must include recognizing the impact this work can have on the rabbi, from setting necessary boundaries, to creating channels for open and honest communication between the rabbi and lay leaders. The strategies that the book of Leviticus employs can be a useful starting point to reflect together on how to negotiate the boundaries constructively in our own contexts.

Practical Implications for Contemporary Communities

One critical aspect of understanding any leadership model is figuring out when and where to employ its strategies and values. Looking at the vast body of literature available to rabbis and community lay leaders, it is clear that no one approach to leadership can solve all of an organization's problems, or give leaders all the tools they need to succeed in every facet of their work. In order to make priestly leadership as practical as possible for rabbis and

their lay leader partners, I would like to suggest a number of situations and processes where priestly leadership can be mostly suitably applied. This is meant to be a starting point for creative brainstorming, not an exhaustive list. Priestly leadership is multi-faceted and, as one can see from the history of the *kohanim,* it has built into it the flexibility and potential to change its shape when needed.

The priestly responsibility for making distinctions between the holy and the ordinary for the community directly connects to the vision and strategic planning processes that many synagogues use. On a regular basis, ranging from one to five years, many synagogue boards often work with their clergy and professional leadership to go through a strategic planning process. This process usually involves writing or revising the organization's mission statement, identifying strengths and opportunities, and setting priorities for their work. At the end of these activities, leaders should have an aspirational vision of success for themselves, as well as a plan for how to achieve those goals.

Rabbis are often designated as the stewards of these visions and play a critical role in implementing a strategic plan. Leviticus prescribes for the priests the role in the community of keeping everyone in a fit condition as often as possible, and making sure they can participate fully in their community's relationship with God. They keep the people accountable to the vision for a holy society that God sets out for Israel at Sinai, and they facilitate the community's capacity to do so.

Using the model of the priests, rabbis can play the role of vision keeper, making sure that all of the decisions leaders make, and the actions they take, reflect the community's stated values. Usually, these principles are outlined in a mission statement or statement of values. To ensure the alignment of mission, vision, and values in all aspects of synagogue

life, the rabbi as priestly leader has the opportunity to remind community members of their own stated goals by consistently reflecting on their core values. Are we acting the way a holy community should act? Where are the teachings of our tradition reflected in this choice? Any major decisions in the life of the community should be measured against the vision the community aspires towards, with the rabbi distinguishing between the holy and the ordinary behavior in everything, from how we pray to how we eat to how we treat one another.

The prominent role that rabbis play as the spiritual leaders of the congregation usually gives them a multitude of opportunities to serve as a teacher for the community. This can range from formal preaching opportunities on the *bimah* in the form of a sermon, to teaching text to people of all ages in the classroom, to more informal teaching moments in meetings and in the hallways. The priestly leadership model reminds the leader that being a conveyer of knowledge is only the first step. Rabbis also can teach in a way that allows the learners to feel ownership over what they know. Learning should result in feeling empowered to act. When God gave the instructions in Leviticus about how to perform sacrifices (Leviticus 1-5) and the assigned portions of the sacrifices for priests (Leviticus 6-7), the priests were not the only ones who learned these commandments. All of Israel heard these instructions too. They were expected to understand it, internalize it, and act accordingly. When rabbis teach their communities about certain traditions, or how to navigate a new text, each learner has the potential to do act independently on it or participate more fully in communal ritual.

Furthermore, once someone possesses information, they have the ability to share it with others as well, perpetuating the chain of tradition forward. They can teach someone else or use their own particular gifts and skills to make the knowledge their own. When Ezra read the *torah* publicly, he read from the sacred scroll and brought others up on the platform to

translate the language so the people could understand. He utilized their skills and made them his partners in teaching. When a group of lay leaders came to Ezra with a desire to learn more *torah*, he studied with them and taught them how to fulfill God's commandments on their own. Consequently, they were able to practice Judaism without his constant supervision. Rabbis can teach with this level of awareness as well to engage learners of all ages in a different way. Invite the lawyer in a Talmud class to "translate" the property laws of the 2nd century CE to contemporary terms. Ask a lay leader who has a strong grasp of holiday rituals to teach the Introduction to Judaism class periodically, instead of the clergy team. Engage with a team of teens who challenge the rabbi to make services more approachable for their peers. When a priestly leader empowers others, their people will more often than not step up and relish the opportunity to teach and lead.

While most communities genuinely value their rabbis as stewards of a vision for holy community and teachers of Jewish wisdom, the human element of the rabbinic role can sometimes slip from their awareness. Rabbis are often put in situations where the expectations thrust on them because of their title alone can become difficult to manage. When one applies for a job, they usually receive a job description that outline the areas of synagogue life the rabbi will be expected to manage. As a rabbi becomes more senior, that portfolio might increase or change its shape dramatically. However, a gap often develops between what the rabbis are actually supposed to be doing and what the community expects of them. Interactions about the role of the rabbi often become multi-layered conversations that point to more than simply job expectations. The rabbi has to contend with other people's life experiences with other rabbis, the good and the bad, and their individual feelings about how a Jewish community ought to be run. Taking on a rabbinic role in a new community is

usually an emergent journey that can take months and years to process, with the need to meet new requirements as they arise. Then there is also the unsettling feeling that many rabbis have deep down, namely that their community thinks that they can be all things to all people at all times.

Priestly leadership provides a precedent for rabbis and lay leaders to work together to clarify roles and expectations. In the context of Leviticus, and throughout the Hebrew Bible, the priest had a very clear set of responsibilities. These roles (outlined in Chapter 3 above) were well known to the community, and limited to the areas of communal life that only a priest could manage, namely purity, impurity, and holiness. Ritual, education, healing, and connecting the people to God took up most of their portfolio. In times of great need, such as when the community was preparing for battle (see Deuteronomy 20), they might slightly deviate from the norm to support the situation at hand. Other than that, the community knew that other people held the responsibility for any number of critical leadership roles that were unique to them. A priest would not regularly be called upon to judge between two people in a dispute. The prophet, not the *kohen*, would speak visionary words given by God to the people, pushing them to think in new ways and speaking truth to power. Warriors laid out the strategy for battling their enemies, and singers in the Temple created a unique worship experience through music. The priest was only the priest.

In overwhelming circumstances or times of fatigue, priestly leadership can help salvage one's work and prevent total burnout by reminding rabbis of the responsibility to delegate. Rabbis can look to the model of the priest when they need to clarify and focus their role. How can I prioritize my time and energy? Which of these items on my to-do list truly require me as a rabbi to be there? Which things should somebody else really do? Does

anyone else share the skill set necessary to accomplish the community's goal? Asking these types of questions can create clarity of purpose for the leader and lead them to engage in some serious delegation, following the model of priests like Ezra. Making distinctions and boundaries in rabbinic work benefits the community enormously. By allowing others to lead, members become more invested in their synagogue and its goals, leaders feel pride in their projects and the institution, and less involved members can be inspired and step up to lead by the example their neighbors have set.

Even with the best of intentions, with serious work being done to care for the rabbis, and with real efforts to democratize community leadership, many rabbinic leaders still find it challenging to manage the expectations their community holds for them. One of the biggest issues many leaders face is balancing the public and the private. This is especially tricky for rabbis because the boundaries are less clear and fixed. The rabbi is an employee of an organization, but they also show up for congregants in times of personal crises, and are involved in the messy, vulnerable parts of their lives. One day they think they have it all under control, but the next day a rainstorm causes the roof to crash in, or they have to run religious school when the director is sick in the hospital. The rabbi is a professional, but they are also under immense scrutiny as a spouse, parent, child, Jew, and community member. The place they go to pray, laugh, celebrate, and mourn with community, to live a full Jewish life, is also the place where they sit at their desks and collect their paycheck. A rabbi lives his or her life in public, and also has to contend with the challenges of living life, period.

Rabbis and the lay leaders with whom they work have the chance to address some of these hard moments and big questions together. These matters need to be tackled informally as they come up, and be discussed formally and proactively on a regular basis. Awareness

can be a key first step. Many times, the public face a rabbi puts forward of a calm, competent, put-together leader does not reflect personal struggles or internal debates they are experiencing. Sometimes, congregants simply do not know about the emotional dimension that comes with the territory of a being their rabbi. Making the decision to attend one more temple meeting instead of a child's soccer game can be extremely difficult. Losing a parent might mean that you need a little more time off before you can lead the *Kaddish* prayer for others. Taking the time away from the synagogue to go study text with another rabbi might look like an hour unaccounted for, but it can also help the rabbi be the best leader they can be because their soul is nourished. When these moments happen, a rabbi can bring that to the attention of trusted leadership partners and engage in a conversation. They might even come prepared to offer potential solutions so lay leaders are more open to dialogue: an hour off here might mean an extra hour somewhere else, a meeting that doesn't need to be in person can be a phone call or even a simple email. The possibilities are endless, as long as both sides can be sensitive to each other's needs and work together. An opportunity to reflect on priestly leadership, with Leviticus as a model, can help ground such conversation in the wisdom of authentic Jewish tradition that reaches back to our very foundations.

Clergy teams can also engage in these conversations and find ways to support one another, especially if lay leaders are not providing the kind of support they need. They can arrange schedules, bounce ideas off of each other, and share life experiences, especially if different rabbis and cantors are at different stages of life. Other communal leaders and members of the congregation play a vital role in supporting rabbis in their efforts to balance their personal, private lives with community obligations and expectations. Rabbis should ideally have other people to lean on in times of crisis. A strong support team can allow the

rabbi to fulfill their role as communal leader while still tending to their own needs. When God struck down Aaron's two sons, Aaron was commanded to stay within the precincts of the sanctuary. All of his mourning would have to be internal, and he was expected to continue his work with sacrifices in the midst of a family tragedy. To make sure the two sons are buried properly and mourned, Moses and the entire community take on the responsibility for these tasks. When their ritual leader cannot, they care for the dead on his behalf. Aaron needed someone to lean on and Moses was there, along with the entire community they were leading together through the wilderness. The same applies to rabbis today. Each rabbi can do the work with their community to plan ahead for personal needs, creating trusting relationships that they can lean on in times of crisis, and ask the right questions about leadership roles when it feels like he or she cannot do it alone.

With the empathy and compassion they cultivate in their own moments of transition, upheaval, and isolation, rabbis have the potential to become pastoral caregivers in the tradition of the *kohen* as outlined in Leviticus 13-14. In the case of the *metzora*, the afflicted person, the priest did not offer immediate solutions to a problem, or provide a catchall cure for a serious breach in the life of an individual and the community. Instead, the priest provided a roadmap for facing the crisis and making sense of it, with the goal of eventually fully restoring the person banished outside the camp back to the people. The priest regularly visited the afflicted person who was outside the camp. Being with another person is one of the simplest acts a priestly leader can perform, accompanying them on an unfamiliar path towards healing and restoration. Rabbis have the same opportunity to be with people in times of pain, sadness, and suffering and to bear witness to these complicated emotions. They can give perspective, notice, and find ways to integrate these hard moments into their life story so

the individual can go on living. The presence one can offer depends on context and previous relationships. It can be a gentle hand, a directive word, or a guiding nudge--whatever meets their needs appropriately.[178]

Pastoral guidance can sometimes be solely for the individual, but it often also can be essential for sustaining a sacred community. The priests attended to disrupted relationships, and took the people through the steps to restore order and balance in the world. In congregational contexts, moments of rupture occur all the time, often when people least expect it. A board member embezzles funds, or a teacher violates boundaries with a student. The walls of the synagogue are covered with anti-Semitic slurs, or a congregant becomes a problematic public figure in their business life. A young child suddenly and tragically dies. When norms and trust established in the community are violated, everyone else often looks to the rabbi to guide them through a process of healing and restoration. To respond, rabbis can look to the priestly model. Instead of offering platitudes or easy answers, he can honestly and clearly name the rupture that has occurred. She can bear witness to someone's experience and validate their claims. The rabbi can then support the community in finding some form of healing and integrating this incident into the larger communal narrative with a sense of resilience.

Sometimes, it is appropriate to welcome the individual person back into the camp after a process of meaningful *teshuvah.* Other times, the best way forward is to protect the interests of the community over the needs of one person. Either way, the congregation places immense trust in the rabbi to help make the right decision for everyone so that the synagogue can remain a place of sacred relationships and real, deep community.

[178] Weiner and Hirschmann, 55.

Laying the foundations for these types of reliable, mutually beneficial relationships requires a long-term process that rabbis and lay leaders need to continually cultivate over the span of their time together. The relationship between a rabbi and their community should be seen as a covenant. The very foundation of Judaism is a covenantal relationship between God and Israel, a relationship where each side has obligations to each other and these obligations lead people to holiness and to God. Leviticus offers many guideposts for how to achieve holiness in biblical times. Its insights have a bearing in the present.

When engaging a rabbi, a congregation enters into a covenant with their new leader. There is accountability on both sides. The rabbi must lead the community and contribute to the spiritual life of their people, but the community must also support the rabbi, take responsibility for their actions, and own their role as leaders of their own people as well. When Ezra saw a problem in his community, he demonstrated his grief and included himself among the guilty of the community. He did not condemn the people outright. When he read from the Torah scroll, he did not tell the people that they were blatant violators of the sacred covenant with God. He taught them Torah and allowed them to connect it to their own behavior. He did not shame them or push them to act according to his own beliefs. He waited for the people to realize the error of their ways and to act on their own.

Priestly leadership serves as a reminder to rabbis that they have the obligation to teach, lead, preach, create, and inspire, but that it does not happen in a vacuum. Community members need to be accountable for their own Jewish lives, to act, pray, respond, participate, and claim the values they espouse. When the laws of Leviticus were given to the priests they were not given to them alone. God wanted the people to be taught as well, and expected them

to be responsible for their knowledge of the rituals and rules that applied to all aspects of communal life. This is how the community could live out their covenant with God.

Today, congregations face the same essential call: to integrate Judaism into the lives of its people, and for the rabbi to serve as the figure that brings the people closer to Torah and God. Priestly leadership offers a model for rabbis who aim to achieve these goals with compassion for everyone involved, who want to share power and knowledge with the community, and who strive to offer a vision for Jewish living that reminds us that everyone can live a life of holiness, even in the messiness of everyday life.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

A perpetual fire shall be kept burning on the altar, not to go out. (Leviticus 6:7)

Serving in a rabbinic role requires a variety of scholarly and ritual skills, the ability to work with and inspire others, a strong sense of values, and creativity. Above all, rabbinic leadership is a vocation, deriving from a call to serve and to teach. In the Hebrew Bible, the *kohanim,* the priests, were the ones called to serve God and the people. They served Adonai at the altar, sacrificing the offerings the people brought to draw near to God, ensuring and protecting channels of communication and contact. When boundaries of purity were breached, the priests restored the borders and preserved the covenantal relationship between God and the people Israel. With the fire eternally burning, a singular vision of holiness maintained, and a clear sense of the law shared across the community, the covenant between the Holy One and the community endured. Without the priests, without our dedicated religious leaders, none of this would have been possible.

My goal with this study was to present a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the Book of Leviticus and the role that the priests played as leaders in ancient Israelite society. Furthermore, I believe that the core principles of the priestly leadership model have much to offer today's rabbis. Their work feels equally high-stakes. Their jobs come with extremely high expectations and they face leadership questions big and small every day. Rabbis have a vision for what ideal sacred Jewish living can look like, but they also need to possess a realistic sense of what is possible in their communities. Their multi-faceted role means that they are a part of the community but also apart from it in many ways. Looking to Leviticus for guidance around these challenges might not be an obvious choice, but I believe that now

it at least has a chance of being one of many sacred sources rabbis draw on for perspective and inspiration.

Priestly leadership offers rabbis and their communities an invaluable opportunity to ask substantial, compelling questions, see old texts in new ways, and strive towards holiness together. I hope that this model of leadership further inspires rabbis to embrace the unique roles in their community that only they can play. Perhaps these examples will further strengthen their capacity to be moved to empower others to learn and lead, and to lean on their people when they need it most.

In the same vein, I hope that communal lay leaders learn something new about these opaque biblical texts. I also intend for them to appreciate even more how critical their leadership can be for creating dynamic, healthy, holy Jewish communities. Their work has equally high risks and rewards, and the relationship they cultivate with their rabbi can have an enormous impact on the life of the congregation. When mistakes are made, when they veer off course, when they unintentionally harm, communities can look to our ancestors' example and do the work towards repair with an eye towards healing without debilitating shame. Each person has a part to play. Ultimately, living in a community rooted in covenant means that everyone must strive to reflect their highest values, to be the best version of themselves, and to see the holiness inherent in every act and word. Only then can rabbis and their congregations can learn from one another the ways that they can each answer the ancient charge to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6)."

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APPENDIX: COMPANION CURRICULUM GUIDE

Being Holy: Exploring Models of Priestly Leadership for Rabbis and Communal Leaders

A Guide for Text Study and Conversation

Created by Lori F. Levine

Companion to Rabbinic Thesis Project

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OVERVIEW

The Opportunity: Why Priestly Leadership?

Anyone who has held a leadership role knows intuitively that different circumstances require different kinds of leadership. In some cases, organizations are looking to transform themselves in a radical way. However, opportunities of this nature for rabbinic leaders are rare in most synagogues. Sometimes, it is simply a matter of managing the day-to-day life of the congregation while staying focused on the community's existing vision for Jewish life and strengthening its foundations.

Rabbis and lay leaders have a wide menu of texts and roles models to seek out, and the leadership literature aimed at them is indeed extensive. There is an opportunity to add one more overlooked, unconventional source the list: the *kohen*, the priest, and Leviticus, the book that lies at the physical center of the Torah but rarely receives sufficient attention from contemporary Jewish leaders. To the extent that rabbis understand their role as related to the sacred, biblical priests become a valuable, possibly a primary model. If we can look past the obscure language, the carefully described ritual sacrifices, and the dry style that many scholars have disparaged, what we can uncover in Leviticus is an approach to leadership that many rabbis crave and did not know was available to them. It is a leadership style that dances constantly between the holy and the ordinary.

Leviticus proposes a Jewish way of living where holiness is accessible to anyone, sins are named and forgiven without shame or moralizing, and every moment has a great and sacred meaning. Priestly leadership gives rabbis and communities permission to imagine a dynamic world that reflects their highest values even as they stand firmly grounded in the reality of the world as they know it. Priestly leadership can continue to draw congregations ever closer to each other and to their vision for Jewish living.

Envisioning the Learning Process: How Does It Work?

This four-lesson curriculum is aimed at rabbis and community leaders who are interested in engaging in Jewish text study together the important questions of leadership. Each session contains the same elements: an introduction, a short biblical text related to the priests and their leadership role in Israelite society, a guided discussion questions about the text itself. Each section concludes with broader questions about the dynamic interaction between rabbinic leadership and community relationship, aiming to generate conversation.

It is assumed that the rabbi would lead these sessions, but a collaborative model of co-teaching with someone else or asking different learners to take turns convening the discussion and text study, would also work well. The lesson plans are easy to navigate and may easily be used by learners with diverse text skill levels and backgrounds, including those wholly inexperienced.

As far as sequence, it is recommended that you start with the first lesson. The other sessions, however, can be done in any order. While there is some flexibility in the structure and timing, each lesson plan is written to last 30-60 minutes. Ideally, the study group would complete the entire curriculum. Each lesson plan comes with a study sheet, but some may opt to use a hard copy of the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) as well—both work well.

These lessons can be done as a separate series of classes or integrated into a board retreat, meeting, or other pertinent program. This experience of learning together, analyzing leadership challenges, and challenging each other in dialogue is only meant to be the beginning. For a deeper understanding of some of the concepts outlined in the texts and more ideas about applying priestly leadership, my Rabbinic Thesis “Leading Towards Holiness: Approaching the *Kohen* (Priest) and Leviticus as Ancient Leadership Sources for Contemporary Jewish Communal Leaders” contains more details and resources to pursue. To make it easy to access, each lesson plan also refers to the chapter in the Rabbinic Thesis where you can learn more.

In addition, some of these conversations might bring up more questions and answers, or require some serious follow-up and concrete planning to do. I hope this does happen! I have included some suggested activities to follow up on these lessons, together with concrete ways to implement some of these leadership ideas. Each

community is invited to continue the journey of drawing upon a priestly leadership model in their own way, and to adapt these principles to be workable for them. All rabbis are unique individuals, as are their lay leader partners. This curriculum is meant to introduce a set of key leadership concepts and to lay the foundation for trusting, open sacred dialogue, and add to a path meaningful brainstorming and learning together.

LESSON 1: Reading Leviticus: Uncovering The Roots of Priest as Leader

Goals:
Learners will be able to...

- ⇒ Explain the basic subject matter of Leviticus and identify important themes in the text
- ⇒ Define in their own words the vocabulary around the priesthood and sacrifices found in the Hebrew Bible
- ⇒ Analyze the unique features of priestly leadership

Source Texts: Leviticus 1-6, preferably with additional commentary.[179]

Corresponding Thesis Chapters: Chapter 2, Chapter 5

Detailed Outline:

INTRODUCTION

Group leader should introduce the topic of the class.

Discuss:

What are some of your own impressions of Leviticus? What do you already know about it?

- What makes this book of the Torah hard to read or relate to?
- What, if anything, interests you about the book of Leviticus?

Invite the group to be open minded to learning a new way of reading Leviticus and finding out what it can teach them about sacred Jewish leadership.

DEFINING THE TERMS

Divide a larger group up into smaller groups of 2-3.
If this material is being studied in *chevruta* (study partners with only 2 people), you can work through the exercise together.

Give each group a word to try and brainstorm together from the list below:

HOLY	PURE
IMPURE	SACRIFICE

[179] Consider looking at 1:1-9, 2:8-10, 4:13-21, 5:20-26. Three especially useful Jewish commentaries: The Jewish Study Bible, The Torah: A Women's Commentary, and The JPS Commentary.

Each group is tasked with developing their own definition for their word. A good place to start might be word association—what does this word make you think of, what does it look like to you? Ask them to simply use their own assumptions and experiences. Later we will look at how we need to understand these words in Leviticus.

After 3-5 minutes of discussion, convene the group back together.
Invite them to share their definitions with the group and record the answers so everyone can see (on a whiteboard, flip-chart, computer screen with projector).

Hand out Source Sheet 1 and ask people to take turns reading going through the definitions of the same words ("Defining Important Terms") that we are going to use for the purposes of studying Leviticus.

Discuss:

- How do these definitions compare?
- Where does your group's definitions match? Where were they a little off track?
- What questions do we still have? Does anything not make sense? (Make a note of these to return to later if any big issues come up)

THE PRIESTLY MODEL

Return back to Source Sheet 1. Look at the "Introduction to the Priestly Leadership Model" section. Read through together.

Discuss:

- What do you like about this model of leadership? What do you find challenging about it?
- Think about the rabbi(s) being like the priests of Leviticus. How can this apply for our congregation today? Where does it not work?
- The priest's major role was offering sacrifices to bring the people near to God. What role does our rabbi play in bringing us closer to the Holy One? Give some concrete examples.
- How does our community or our lay leaders create a sense of holiness or nearness to God? Give examples.

SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:

★ *SETTING LEARNING GOALS*
Knowing what you know now, you might ask the group to create a set of learning goals for the remaining lessons. What do you hope to get out of this? What else are you hoping to learn? Make sure to make the goals achievable but still meaningful. For each goal, come up with your objective and also the potential outcome—what will it look like if you achieve this goal? How will you know?

★ *IDENTIFYING PRIESTLY LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES*
Take a closer look at the priestly leadership model and engage in some brainstorming as a group. You might think about times in your community where this approach to leadership could be useful (past, present, or future). Come up with some ways that your congregation might benefit from using the priestly leadership model, as you understand it so far.

Reading Leviticus: Uncovering The Roots of Priest as Leader

Defining Important Terms

HOLY	**IMPURE**
o The relationship between God and Israel is defined by holiness, a unique sacred dedication between a people and their deity. o The *q-d-s* (קדש) mainly connotes distinction and separation on the one hand and, a unique relation to God the holy one on the other. Means also "to consecrate." o According to the first half of Leviticus (1-16) holiness is not innate in human beings or in the world. Holiness belongs to God alone. In Leviticus 17-26, holiness becomes something accessible to all the people of Israel, not solely the priests. Holiness requires embracing a wide-range of commandments. What one does in social, economical or ethical realms is just as critical to holiness and to God.	o *Tumah,* impurity (often mistranslated as "uncleanness"), has no direct relationship to physical cleanliness or hygiene. o The sacrificial system is rooted in very concrete, amoral notions of purity. Medical metaphors are perhaps the most apt for illustrating the seriousness of purity and the fear of impurity as constant contaminations suggested in Leviticus. Compare with consequences of willingly spreading a dangerous disease to healthy people. o For the ancient author, sources of impurity were very real, even if they were not visible. Impurity builds up on holy people, objects, and places. It has to be washed off with the rites of atonement (compare with viruses today). o The impure can be set right with a sacrifice of a ritually pure animal in some cases, or washing and waiting until evening, depending on the transgression.
PURE	**SACRIFICE**
o Practically everything in God's creation has the potential to be pure or *tahor* (in Hebrew). o The rituals performed by the priest temporarily restore the individual, thing, or place to wholeness and purity after defilement. o Ritual purity can also be seen as a kind of protection: the holy people, places and things are protected from profanation when they are purified. The rites for endowing or restoring purity also elevate the object of purification—they become permissible for God.	o The key verb for a sacrificial offering is *qorban*, which means something brought near to God (from the root q-r-b, indicating closeness). o The purposes of sacrifices generally fall into a few major categories: (1) Sacrifice as a gift to God (2) Sacrifice as a means of expiation for unintentional sins (3) Sacrifice as a means of communing with God

Introduction to the Priestly Leadership Model

Priestly leadership consists of…

Holding the Vision in the Face of Reality
The priest perpetuates the vision a society holds of itself, and tries to bridge the gap between reality and the ideal. Priestly leadership focuses on upholding the highest ideals a community has established for itself, while considering any potential changes based on the community's present needs and limitations. A priestly leader holds a realistic vision of what can be in his or her community. They are responsible for reminding the people of the vision they strive toward, and helping guide them towards new ways of realizing that same vision.

Healing Relationships, Guiding with Compassion
Priestly leadership also provides the rabbinic leader with the opportunity to step into the priestly role of healer. In every Jewish community there are incidents that bubble up to the surface and have a negative impact on communal life. Perhaps one individual broke the trust of others, or the entire community experienced a sudden loss. The priestly model designates the leader as the person most suited to facilitate a process of communal healing and illustrates some ways to approach the task.

Democratizing Knowledge
Just as the priests were responsible for the knowing the laws and then teaching them to the people, priestly leadership calls on the leader to share responsibility for sacred knowledge with the entire community. By openly sharing this knowledge, the priest was not alone. Individual member of the community could be responsible in important ways for maintaining their own holy status. Priestly leaders today have a similar opportunity to empower their communities by encouraging them to learn. A priestly leader does not just teach their community what they need to know as the need arises. He or she teaches them proactively about the core and complex foundations of the tradition, as well as how to learn and uncover new ideas in the tradition or envision new application on their own.

Valuing Deep Relationships, Acknowledging the Limitations
Another aspect of priestly leadership that requires explication is the value placed on interpersonal relationships. Due to the biblical priest's many roles, he was often privileged to have an up close and personal relationship with ordinary people. In fact, the majority of problems calling for leadership are everyday situations, not great moments of heroic sacrifice and risk. The priest, while valuing personal connections, was not meant to be all things to all people. Other individuals, like the prophets, the warriors, and the tribal elders, fulfilled different functions. Shared spheres of leadership were present and areas of specialties, as it were, respected. With their combined leadership, the community was able to grow and flourish. Priestly leadership encourages the leader to play a set of prescribed roles in the community and rely on others to do their jobs as well.

- What do you like about this model of leadership? What do you find challenging about it?
- How can this apply for our congregation today? Where does it not really work?
- The priest's major role was offering sacrifices to bring the people near to God. What role does our rabbi play in bringing us closer to the Holy One? Give some concrete examples.
- How does our community or our lay leaders create a sense of holiness or nearness to God? Give examples.

LESSON 2: The Case of the *Metzora*: Providing Paths to Healing and Restoration

Goals:
Learners will be able to...

- ⇒ Outline the process of purifying a person with *tzara'at* from identifying the disease to restoration
- ⇒ Describe the role of the priest in this process as healer
- ⇒ Apply the role of priest as healer to relevant situations in congregational life

Source Texts: Leviticus 13-14 with commentary, or at least 13:1-17, 45-46 and Leviticus 14:1-20, 54-57

Corresponding Thesis Chapters: Chapter 3

Detailed Outline:

STUDYING THE TEXT: The Case of the *Metzora*[180]

Distribute Source Sheet 2 to the learners. Read the text together, stopping to go through relevant discussion questions. This can be done in pairs, small groups, or as one group together.

Ask learners to summarize what they've learned in their own words. What did this process actually look like? Outline the steps together on the board or in another way where everyone can see the visual representation.

- o Allow learners to lead the discussion, but make sure all the important steps delineated in Levitucus 13-14 are included. Discussion leader should use the model below to create a full picture of the process that the text describes.

    1. Reporting the initial concern to the priest.

    2. The priest discerns and observes: Is this really *tzara'at*? Could it be something else?

    3. The priest identifies the scaly skin affliction as full *tzara'a.*

    4. The Metzora declares their own impurity: They immediately had to perform the tearing of the clothes and messing their hair. They had to call out publicly, "*Tamei! Tamei!,"* while covering their upper lip, making their impure status publically known to protect others from contamination.

[180] Defined as a person afflicted with a specific, contaminating skin disease.

5. The Metzora left the camp and was isolated for seven days.

6. Every seven days, the priest went out to examine the *metzora* and check their progress.

7. Ritual of purification for re-entering the community
    a. Outside the borders of the camp, the priest would begin the process of transformation by declaring the person to finally be *tahor*.
    b. Seven days later, the priest would offer a sacrifice of expiation on the person's behalf. The previously afflicted persons would then be given clean garments to put on.
    c. Immediately, the priests would smear the blood from the sacrifice on their right-side extremities. The ritual is virtually identical with the ordination ritual of the priest.
    d. On the eighth day, the individual would bring the materials for four sacrifices to God and return fully to communal life.

DISCUSS: LEADER AS COMPASSIONATE GUIDE

Sample Discussion Questions

- In these passages, the priest facilitates a process of healing in the sense of restoring a person fully to the community, but they don't offer a cure. How do you differentiate between these two ideas: healing and curing? Why is that important?
- Who seems to bear responsibility for this disease?
- Why does the *metzora* need to be isolated?
- Throughout this process, how does the priest treat the *metzora*? How does that dynamic strike you?

- The priest provides guidelines and a map for the afflicted person. How can it help the healing process to have guides and people to bear witness to someone's suffering along the way? Think about your own experiences.

- Sometimes, the priest just comes to sit with the *metzora* and check on them. Why is being a present for someone so powerful and important? Did anyone read that differently?

- The priests offer a ritual to restore the healed person to purity. If the person's skin is already better, why did they do this? Why is ritual important for making transitions in our lives? How does it help you in your own life?

- How can our rabbi serve as a compassionate guide for healing in our community? For individuals? For certain groups? For all of us?

- Today, what are some of the modern equivalents of *tzara'at*? This disease was seen as a rupture in communal life and the priest had to protect the community from the danger of becoming impure. What about our communities? Think about breaches in trust, attacks from the outside, random moments where there are pain and suffering but it's hard to find meaning in it.

- Where can our rabbis be our compassionate guides to healing in those challenging times? What about our professional staff? How about other lay leaders, like the board or volunteers?

SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:

★ *CREATING A GUIDE FOR HEALING*
Using a past example or brainstorm based on what you know about your community (population, location, special issues, etc.), create a set of guidelines for engaging in healing after a major breach. What role does the rabbi play? How do we share information? What about the role of other community leaders? How do we treat the person or people involved, if any? What role do we want rituals to play (song, prayers, gatherings, art, and more)?

★ *DESIGN A PROCESS FOR RESTORATION IN YOUR COMMUNITY*
Think about it from the *metzora* point of view. When someone loses the trust of the community, hurts others, or violates boundaries, how do we want to help guide them through a process of restoration? Think about the role of the rabbi, the use of public rituals or private ones done in isolation, and reflect on other factors that the leadership needs to consider before allowing restoration to occur. How do leaders need to notice and bear witness? When and how do they collect information? What boundaries need to be maintained? When do we cut certain people off and when do we welcome them in? Be as specific or general as the group would like to be.

The Case of the *Metzora*[181]: Providing Paths to Healing and Restoration

Leviticus 13:1-17, 45-46

Adonai spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling, a rash, or a discoloration, and it develops into a scaly affection on the skin of his body, it shall be reported to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons, the priests. The priest shall examine the affection on the skin of his body: if hair in the affected patch has turned white and the affection appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is a leprous affection; when the priest sees it, he shall pronounce him unclean. But if it is a white discoloration on the skin of his body which does not appear to be deeper than the skin and the hair in it has not turned white, the priest shall isolate the affected person for seven days.

On the seventh day the priest shall examine him, and if the affection has remained unchanged in color and the disease has not spread on the skin, the priest shall isolate him for another seven days. On the seventh day the priest shall examine him again: if the affection has faded and has not spread on the skin, the priest shall pronounce him clean. It is a rash; he shall wash his clothes, and he shall be clean. But if the rash should spread on the skin after he has presented himself to the priest and been pronounced clean, he shall present himself again to the priest. And if the priest sees that the rash has spread on the skin, the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is tzara'at.

When a person has a scaly affection, it shall be reported to the priest. If the priest finds on the skin a white swelling which has turned some hair white, with a patch of discolored flesh in the swelling, it is chronic tzara'at on the skin of his body, and the priest shall pronounce him unclean; he need not isolate him, for he is unclean. If the eruption spreads out over the skin so that it covers all the skin of the affected person from head to foot, wherever the priest can see— if the priest sees that the eruption has covered the whole body—he shall pronounce the affected person clean; he is clean, for he has turned all white. But as soon as discolored flesh appears in it, he shall be unclean; when the priest sees the discolored flesh, he shall pronounce him unclean. The discolored flesh is unclean; it is tzara'at. But if the discolored flesh again turns white, he shall come to the priest, and the priest shall examine him: if the affection has turned white, the priest shall pronounce the affected person clean; he is clean.…

... As for the person with tzara'at, his clothes shall be rent, his head shall be left bare, and he shall cover over his upper lip; and he shall call out, "*Tamei! Tamei* !" He shall be unclean as long as the disease is on him. Being unclean, he shall dwell apart; his dwelling shall be outside the camp…

Leviticus 14:1-20

Adonai spoke to Moses, saying: This shall be the ritual for a metzora at the time that he is to be cleansed. When it has been reported to the priest, the priest shall go outside the camp. If

[181] Remember: Metzora is the afflicted person. Tzara'at is the name of the disease itself, a kind of skin disease, considered in the past to be leprosy and contagious.

the priest sees that the metzora has been healed of his scaly affection, the priest shall order two live clean birds, cedar wood, crimson stuff, and hyssop to be brought for him who is to be cleansed. The priest shall order one of the birds slaughtered over fresh water in an earthen vessel; and he shall take the live bird, along with the cedar wood, the crimson stuff, and the hyssop, and dip them together with the live bird in the blood of the bird that was slaughtered over the fresh water.

He shall then sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed of the eruption and cleanse him; and he shall set the live bird free in the open country. The one to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, shave off all his hair, and bathe in water; then he shall be clean. After that he may enter the camp, but he must remain outside his tent seven days. On the seventh day he shall shave off all his hair—of head, beard, and eyebrows. When he has shaved off all his hair, he shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water; then he shall be clean. On the eighth day he shall take two male lambs without blemish, one ewe lamb in its first year without blemish, three-tenths of a measure of choice flour with oil mixed in for a meal offering, and one log of oil. These shall be presented before Adonai, with the man to be cleansed, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, by the priest who performs the cleansing.

The priest shall take one of the male lambs and offer it with the log of oil as a guilt offering, and he shall elevate them as an elevation offering before Adonai The lamb shall be slaughtered at the spot in the sacred area where the sin offering and the burnt offering are slaughtered. For the guilt offering, like the sin offering, goes to the priest; it is most holy. The priest shall take some of the blood of the guilt offering, and the priest shall put it on the ridge of the right ear of him who is being cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot.

The priest shall then take some of the log of oil and pour it into the palm of his own left hand. And the priest shall dip his right finger in the oil that is in the palm of his left hand and sprinkle some of the oil with his finger seven times before Adonai. Some of the oil left in his palm shall be put by the priest on the ridge of the right ear of the one being cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot—over the blood of the guilt offering. The rest of the oil in his palm the priest shall put on the head of the one being cleansed. Thus the priest shall make expiation for him before Adonai. The priest shall then offer the sin offering and make expiation for the one being cleansed of his uncleanness. Last, the burnt offering shall be slaughtered, and the priest shall offer the burnt offering and the meal offering on the altar, and the priest shall make expiation for him. Then he shall be clean.…

DISCUSSION: Think about some of these questions together…

- In these passages, the priest facilitates a process of healing but they don't offer a cure. How do you differentiate between these two ideas: healing and curing?
- Throughout this process, how does the priest treat the *metzora*? How does that dynamic strike you?
- Sometimes, the priest just comes to sit with the *metzora* and check on them. Why is being a present for someone so powerful and important?
- How can our rabbi serve as a compassionate guide for moments of healing in our community?
- Where can our rabbis be our compassionate guides to healing in challenging times? What about our professional staff? How about other lay leaders, like the board or volunteers?

LESSON 3: Ezra: Teaching to Lead and Leading to Teach

Goals:
Learners will be able to...

- ⇒ Describe Ezra's roles as scribe, priest, and communal leader
- ⇒ Evaluate the impact of sharing knowledge and delegation on a community
- ⇒ Compile opportunities for empowering others to lead and learn

Source Texts: Ezra 7:1-10, 8:15-10:17, Nehemiah 8

Corresponding Thesis Chapters: Chapter 4

Detailed Outline:

MEET EZRA HA-KOHEN: EZRA THE PRIEST AND SCRIBE

Ask if anyone has heard of Ezra. Share some background information to contextualize his leadership of the community.

Background Information:

- o Starts in 458 BCE, a crucial time in the life of the nation as it sought to reconstruct itself after exile. His focus as a leader was to study and teach the laws of God.
- o Ezra came up from Babylon as a part of a migration of the Judeans whose families had been exiled earlier. They began to come to Jerusalem at the behest of Cyrus, the Persian emperor at the time (Ezra 1:2-4).
- o Ezra served as a proxy for governmental authority over the community. He could do whatever he chose, even severely punishing violators of the law. Ezra carried out the mission he was given by the king, but he chose not to overstep his power or abuse his position, and in fact did not use his authority except when the community urged him to. He never depended on royal authorization. Instead, he used persuasion and example.
- o The book of Ezra meticulously establishes Ezra's family line, making clear the legitimacy of his priestly leadership in the community. Ezra 7 lays out his genealogy, taking the reader all the way back to Aaron, the very first anointed priest (7:5-6). Clear continuity is established between the leadership of Aaron and Ezra.
- o Ezra is described as a skilled scribe (7:6). It means he was well educated at a time when litracy was the privilege of the few. He did not simply take notes in meetings. As a scribe Ezra was more like a high official, holding key documents and including the letter from King Artaxerxes authorizing him to teach *torah* and the *torah* of Moses itself.

Now, we get to take a look at how Ezra's leadership created a more knowledgeable, empowered, connected community in ancient Israel.

Distribute Source Sheet 3.

HOLY LEADERSHIP for ALL

Read over the passages from Ezra 8-10 on the Source Sheet.

Engage with some of the suggested Discussion Questions or come up with your own!

There are two major themes here: (1) how Ezra delegates and works with others and (Ezra 8) (2) how he leads with persuasion over force and hierarchy (Ezra 9-10).

**There is a lot of text to cover here and potentially limited time. It is recommended that you divide up into small groups and have people present what they discussed to the larger group OR choose 2 of the text discussions to focus on together.
The goal is to leave with a holistic picture of Ezra's contributions to the model of priestly leadership.

TEACHING for LEADERSHIP

Read over the passages from Nehemiah 8 on the Source Sheet.

The major theme for these passages is the importance of sharing knowledge with community leaders, delegating to a larger group of leaders and having them help educate the rest of the community

Review some of the Discussion Questions from the Source Sheet or go with whatever most engages the group about this narrative.

APPLYING EZRA'S LESSONS

After reviewing both sets of texts, identify opportunities in your community to apply some of these leadership lessons:

- How can our rabbi(s) help empower more community members to be their leadership partners? Be specific.

- When should leaders "show" instead of "tell"? How can we as leaders model the type of expectations for Jewish living we want our members to follow? Think about the biggest communal moments and the little interactions in between.

SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:

- ★ *EMPOWERING OTHERS THROUGH STUDY*
  Take time as a group to think about areas of Jewish practice where more support is needed or the community could rethink their approach to study, like Torah reading, coordinating a holiday celebration, or something else. Prioritize the list based on the most potential for community members to get involved and the areas of greatest need. Develop plans for training a team of

lay leaders to support the rabbi in this area, including a list of potential members to recruit, and a timeline for their work. Think about what skills other folks can bring to the table. The rabbis will develop the materials and lead any study and training sessions on the Judaic content. Lay leaders will partner with the rabbi(s) in this effort and take responsibility for executing the plans with the community.

★ *TAKING ON NEW LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES*
Noting that Ezra in Ezra 10 engages in dialogue with the community about the best way forward, reflect on the following: If there is a specific issue involving lay leadership in the community, the rabbi can use this text as an opportunity to introduce a larger conversation with the eventual goal of problem-solving together. The rabbi should prepare some thoughts to share ahead of time and after the text study, deliver a charge to the lay leaders present for this text study effort. A board president or higher-level lay leader might also want to use this opportunity to identify a challenge as well, and they should feel free to do so in partnership with the rabbi. This presentation might involve an "ask" for partnership and support if the rabbi is feeling over-extended, critical feedback on a project that is not working as well as it could, or an area of community life that he or she wants to improve. As a result, an opportunity for dialogue can be introduced, and multiple paths forward may emerge, such as setting some new goals, determining next steps, and potential solutions to experiment with together.

Ezra: Teaching to Lead and Leading to Teach

HOLY LEADERSHIP for ALL

The Power of Delegation

Ezra 8:15-30

These I assembled by the river that enters Ahava, and we encamped there for three days. I reviewed the people and the priests, but I did not find any Levites there. I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, the leading men, and also for Joiarib and Elnathan, the instructors, and I gave them an order for Iddo, the leader at the place [called] Casiphia. I gave them a message to convey to Iddo [and] his brother, temple-servants at the place [called] Casiphia, that they should bring us attendants for the House of our God. Thanks to the benevolent care of our God for us, they brought us a capable man of the family of Mahli son of Levi son of Israel, and Sherebiah and his sons and brothers, 18 in all, and Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiah of the family of Merari, his brothers and their sons, 20 in all; and of the temple servants whom David and the officers had appointed for the service of the Levites–220 temple servants, all of them listed by name.

I proclaimed a fast there by the Ahava River to afflict ourselves before our God to beseech Him for a smooth journey for us and for our children and for all our possessions; for I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us against any enemy on the way, since we had told the king, "The benevolent care of our God is for all who seek Him, while His fierce anger is against all who forsake Him." So we fasted and besought our God for this, and He responded to our plea.

Then I selected twelve of the chiefs of the priests, namely Sherebiah and Hashabiah with ten of their brothers, and I weighed out to them the silver, the gold, and the vessels, the contribution to the House of our God which the king, his counselors and officers, and all Israel who were present had made. I entrusted to their safekeeping the weight of six hundred and fifty talents of silver, one hundred silver vessels of one talent each, one hundred talents of gold; also, twenty gold bowls worth one thousand darics and two vessels of good, shining bronze, as precious as gold. I said to them, "You are consecrated to the LORD, and the vessels are consecrated, and the silver and gold are a freewill offering to the LORD God of your fathers. Guard them diligently until such time as you weigh them out in the presence of the officers of the priests and the Levites and the officers of the clans of Israel in Jerusalem in the chambers of the House of the LORD." So the priests and the Levites received the cargo of silver and gold and vessels by weight, to bring them to Jerusalem to the House of our God.

Discussion:

- Note that Levites were clergy/cult personnel of lower status than the priests. What does Ezra do when he notices there are no Levites among his group?
- How does Ezra delegate here and imbue the other leaders, the *Kohanim* and the Levites, with responsibility?
- Why do you think it was important for Ezra, at this moment before entering the land of Israel and Jerusalem, to share leadership and power with others?

Persuasion Towards Problem-Solving

Ezra 9

When this was over, the officers approached me, saying, "The people of Israel and the priests and Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the land whose abhorrent practices are like those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. They have taken their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy seed has become intermingled with the peoples of the land; and it is the officers and prefects who have taken the lead in this trespass." When I heard this, I rent my garment and robe, I tore hair out of my head and beard, and I sat desolate. Around me gathered all who were concerned over the words of the God of Israel because of the returning exiles' trespass, while I sat desolate until the evening offering.

At the time of the evening offering I ended my self-affliction; still in my torn garment and robe, I got down on my knees and spread out my hands to Adonai my God, and said, "O my God, I am too ashamed and mortified to lift my face to You, O my God, for our iniquities are overwhelming and our guilt has grown high as heaven. From the time of our fathers to this very day we have been deep in guilt. Because of our iniquities, we, our kings, and our priests have been handed over to foreign kings, to the sword, to captivity, to pillage, and to humiliation, as is now the case. But now, for a short while, there has been a reprieve from Adonai our God, who has granted us a surviving remnant and given us a stake in His holy place; our God has restored the luster to our eyes and furnished us with a little sustenance in our bondage. For bondsmen we are, though even in our bondage God has not forsaken us, but has disposed the king of Persia favorably toward us, to furnish us with sustenance and to raise again the House of our God, repairing its ruins and giving us a hold in Judah and Jerusalem.

"Now, what can we say in the face of this, O our God, for we have forsaken Your commandments, which You gave us through Your servants the prophets when You said, 'The land that you are about to possess is a land unclean through the uncleanness of the peoples of the land, through their abhorrent practices with which they, in their impurity, have filled it from one end to the other. Now then, do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons or let their daughters marry your sons; do nothing for their well-being or advantage, then you will be strong and enjoy the bounty of the land and bequeath it to your children forever.'

After all that has happened to us because of our evil deeds and our deep guilt–though You, our God, have been forbearing, [punishing us] less than our iniquity [deserves] in that You have granted us such a remnant as this–shall we once again violate Your commandments by intermarrying with these peoples who follow such abhorrent practices? Will You not rage against us till we are destroyed without remnant or survivor? O Adonai, God of Israel, You are benevolent, for we have survived as a remnant, as is now the case. We stand before You in all our guilt, for we cannot face You on this account."

Discussion:

- The leaders bring a major problem to Ezra's attention: the people, including the most important leaders, have married idolatrous Canaanite women. How does Ezra react?
- Why doesn't he blame the people right away? Why does he mourn publicly and pray to God instead?
- How do you imagine the people felt watching him? What do they learn from his prayer?

Empowerment and Negotiation as Leadership Tools
Ezra 10:1-17

While Ezra was praying and making confession, weeping and prostrating himself before the House of God, a very great crowd of Israelites gathered about him, men, women, and children; the people were weeping bitterly. Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel of the family of Elam spoke up and said to Ezra, "We have trespassed against our God by bringing into our homes foreign women from the peoples of the land; but there is still hope for Israel despite this. Now then, let us make a covenant with our God to expel all these women and those who have been born to them, in accordance with the bidding of Adonai and of all who are concerned over the commandment of our God, and let the Teaching be obeyed. Take action, for the responsibility is yours and we are with you. Act with resolve!"

So Ezra at once put the officers of the priests and the Levites and all Israel under oath to act accordingly, and they took the oath. Then Ezra rose from his place in front of the House of God and went into the chamber of Jehohanan son of Eliashib; there, he ate no bread and drank no water, for he was in mourning over the trespass of those who had returned from exile. Then a proclamation was issued in Judah and Jerusalem that all who had returned from the exile should assemble in Jerusalem, and that anyone who did not come in three days would, by decision of the officers and elders, have his property confiscated and himself excluded from the congregation of the returning exiles.

All the men of Judah and Benjamin assembled in Jerusalem in three days; it was the ninth month, the twentieth of the month. All the people sat in the square of the House of God, trembling on account of the event and because of the rains. Then Ezra the priest got up and said to them, "You have trespassed by bringing home foreign women, thus aggravating the guilt of Israel. So now, make confession to the LORD, God of your fathers, and do His will, and separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign women."

The entire congregation responded in a loud voice, "We must surely do just as you say. However, many people are involved, and it is the rainy season; it is not possible to remain out in the open, nor is this the work of a day or two, because we have transgressed extensively in this matter. Let our officers remain on behalf of the entire congregation, and all our townspeople who have brought home foreign women shall appear before them at scheduled times, together with the elders and judges of each town, in order to avert the burning anger of our God from us on this account." Only Jonathan son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah remained for this purpose, assisted by Meshullam and Shabbethai, the Levites. The returning exiles did so. Ezra the priest and the men who were the chiefs of the ancestral clans–all listed by name–sequestered themselves on the first day of the tenth month to study the matter. By the first day of the first month they were done with all the men who had brought home foreign women.

Discussion:

- What do the exiles conclude based on Ezra's actions and speech? How are they persuaded to act?
- What do they think the solution should be to repair their relationship with God? How does Ezra hold them accountable?
- When Ezra proposes they deal immediately with the foreign women, what do the people do? What does this suggest about the relationship between Ezra and the community leaders?

TEACHING for LEADERSHIP

Making Space for Others to Teach

Nehemiah 8:1-12

The entire people assembled as one in the square before the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the scroll of the Teaching of Moses with which Adonai had charged Israel. On the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought the Teaching before the congregation, men and women and all who could listen with understanding. He read from it, facing the square before the Water Gate, from the first light until midday, to the men and the women and those who could understand; the ears of all the people were given to the scroll of the Teaching.

Ezra the scribe stood upon a wooden tower made for the purpose, and beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah at his right, and at his left Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, Meshullam. Ezra opened the scroll in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people; as he opened it, all the people stood up.

Ezra blessed Adonai, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," with hands upraised. Then they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves before Adonai with their faces to the ground. Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites explained the Teaching to the people, while the people stood in their places. They read from the scroll of the Teaching of God, translating it and giving the sense; so they understood the reading.

Nehemiah the Tirshatha, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were explaining to the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God: you must not mourn or weep," for all the people were weeping as they listened to the words of the Teaching. He further said to them, "Go, eat choice foods and drink sweet drinks and send portions to whoever has nothing prepared, for the day is holy to our Lord. Do not be sad, for your rejoicing in the LORD is the source of your strength." The Levites were quieting the people, saying, "Hush, for the day is holy; do not be sad." Then all the people went to eat and drink and send portions and make great merriment, for they understood the things they were told.

Discussion:

- Though Ezra is known as the teacher of Torah and he is invited to read, he chooses not to do it alone. We know that some of the people on the platform with Ezra belong to the larger community and some may be priests or Levites. How did he involve them in teaching Torah?
- Why do you think Ezra wanted other community leaders involved?
- When the people hear the Torah and realize they have not followed its teachings, they weep. How does Ezra work with the other leaders to calm the people?
- How does he encourage the people and gain their trust? Why not punish or rebuke them right away?

Learning for Empowered Leadership
Nehemiah 8:13-18

On the second day, the heads of the clans of all the people and the priests and Levites gathered to Ezra the scribe to study the words of the Teaching. They found written in the Teaching that the LORD had commanded Moses that the Israelites must dwell in booths during the festival of the seventh month, and that they must announce and proclaim throughout all their towns and Jerusalem as follows, "Go out to the mountains and bring leafy branches of olive trees, pine trees, myrtles, palms and [other] leafy trees to make booths, as it is written."

So the people went out and brought them, and made themselves booths on their roofs, in their courtyards, in the courtyards of the House of God, in the square of the Water Gate and in the square of the Ephraim Gate. The whole community that returned from the captivity made booths and dwelt in the booths–the Israelites had not done so from the days of Joshua son of Nun to that day–and there was very great rejoicing. He read from the scroll of the Teaching of God each day, from the first to the last day. They celebrated the festival seven days, and there was a solemn gathering on the eighth, as prescribed.

Discussion

- After the public Torah reading, how do the community leaders react to their lack of knowledge? How do they decide the remedy the situation?
- Who leads the effort to celebrate Sukkot with the community?
- Why doesn't Ezra tell them what to do or take charge?
- How do you think this experience changed their outlook on community leadership? What about their approach to Jewish learning?

LESSON 4:
Nadav & Avihu: Navigating the Personal and Professional in Public Life

Goals:
Learners will be able to...

- Summarize the story of Nadav and Avihu in Leviticus 10, focusing on Aaron
- Analyze Aaron's words and actions in the narrative
- Discuss the implications of the story pertaining to leadership challenges in a public role

Source Texts: Leviticus 10

Corresponding Thesis Chapters: Chapter 3, Chapter 4

Detailed Outline:

LEVITICUS 10: PARSING A TRAUMATIC LEADERSHIP MOMENT

As a group, discuss what you already know about Aaron. Some important facts:

- Moses' older brother, younger brother of Miriam
- Serves as Moses' spokesperson and leads alongside him in Egypt, helps liberate the Israelite people. They work together
- Golden Calf incident (Exodus 32): Helps the people build an idol made of gold. Big leadership mistake!
- Great leader elsewhere, known as "pursuer of peace"
- First anointed priest in Israel (Leviticus 8-9). Ancestor of all priests. Takes over the ritual role Moses had played up until that point historically.
- Dies before Moses.

Distribute Source Sheet 4.

Explain that the group is now going to approach a challenging, traumatic moment in Aaron's life. Much about this episode is confusing, but we are going to focus on understanding Aaron's behavior and what we can learn from it in terms of leadership.

Read through the text on the Source Sheet and use the discussion questions to guide conversation.

NAVIGATING BOUNDARIES OF A PUBLIC ROLE WITH PRIVATE NEEDS

Invite the group now to translate the lessons we learn from Aaron's experience. Today, our rabbis serve public roles of leadership in our community.

Aaron is a man who tragically lost two sons while they were trying to act as priests. When can the boundaries between public and private be tricky to navigate? Share real experiences, if appropriate, or brainstorm hypotheticals.

How do these issues of public service and private needs or crises impact rabbis?

How might these questions have an impact on our community's leadership (lay and professional)? How can the difficulties of serving in a public role impact the community as a whole?

What do we do as a community to support our rabbis when they need us most? Where do we fall short?

How can we (the lay leaders) do better? What do we need to learn and do in order to improve the help we give our rabbi(s)?

SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- ★ *CREATE A SUPPORT PLAN*
  Use what you have learned about Aaron in this lesson to be proactive. Acknowledging the fact that rabbis experience personal problems and go through overwhelming times, think creatively about how the community and its leadership can partner with the rabbi before the incident occurs. If an incident has already happened previously, consider drawing on that experience to improve for the future. Come up with a number of actionable goals for helping the rabbi when they need it. In particular, think about ways community leaders can advocate for the rabbi's personal boundaries while they continue to lead the community. Establish the lines of communication and who needs to know and do what at which times. Create a work plan you can follow. Be as thorough as possible in your brainstorming because it may open up some really important conversations!

  Think about major moments and milestones, like the rabbi losing a loved one or coping with illness, as well as less obvious needs like approaching burnout after multiple years on the job, or feeling overextending with programming responsibilities.

Nadav & Avihu: Navigating the Personal and Professional in Public Life

Leviticus 10

10 Now Nadav and Avihu, sons of Aaron, each took his censer, put fire in it, laid
incense on it, and offered unauthorized fire before ADONAI, something he had not
ordered them to do. 2 At this, fire came forth from the presence of ADONAI and
consumed them, so that they died in the presence of ADONAI. 3 Moses said to
Aaron, "This is what ADONAI said: 'Through those who are near me I will be
consecrated, and before all the people I will be glorified.'" Aaron fell silent.

4 Moses called Misha'el and Eltzafan, sons of Uziel Aaron's uncle, and told them,
"Come here, and carry your cousins away from in front of the sanctuary to a
place outside the camp." 5 They approached and carried them in their tunics out
of the camp, as Moses had said.

6 Then Moses told Aaron and his sons Elazar and Itamar, "Don't unbind your hair
or tear your clothes in mourning, so that you won't die and so that *ADONAI* won't
be angry with the entire community. Rather, let your kinsmen — the whole
house of Israel — mourn, because of the destruction *ADONAI* brought about with
his fire. 7 Moreover, don't leave the entrance to the tent of meeting, or you will
die, because *ADONAI*'s anointing oil is on you."

DISCUSS...

- God suddenly strikes down Aaron's sons with fire. Aaron is silent after God's cryptic explanation. How do you imagine Aaron is feeling internally? How might hearing his reaction change this moment?
- What is the reason Moses says that Aaron, Elazar, and Itamar cannot mourn? How do you understand it?
- What do you think about his proposal that Moses and the community mourn instead? What does it say about the relationship between Aaron's family and the community at large?
- Aaron is told he needs to stay in the holy boundaries of the tent of meeting because of his job as anointed priest. What does this tell us about the importance of Aaron's role? About the priorities God sets?

8 ADONAI said to Aaron, 9 "Don't drink any wine or other intoxicating liquor,
neither you nor your sons with you, when you enter the tent of meeting, so that
you will not die. This is to be a permanent regulation through all your
generations, 10 so that you will distinguish between the holy and the common,

and between the unclean and the clean; 11 and so that you will teach the people of Israel all the laws ADONAI has told them through Moses."

12 Moses said to Aaron and to Elazar and Itamar, his remaining sons, "Take the grain offering left from the offerings for ADONAI made by fire, and eat it without leaven next to the altar, because it is especially holy. 13 Eat it in a holy place, because it is your and your sons' share of the offerings for ADONAI made by fire; for this is what I have been ordered. 14 The breast that was waved and the thigh that was raised you are to eat in a clean place — you, your sons and your daughters with you; for these are given as your and your children's share of the sacrifices of the peace offerings presented by the people of Israel. 15 They are to bring the raised thigh and the waved breast, along with the offerings of fat made by fire, and wave it as a wave offering before ADONAI; then it will belong to you and your descendants with you as your perpetual share, as ADONAI has ordered."

16 Then Moses carefully investigated what had happened to the goat of the sin offering and discovered that it had been burned up. He became angry with Elazar and Itamar, the remaining sons of Aaron, and asked, 17 "Why didn't you eat the sin offering in the area of the sanctuary, since it is especially holy? He gave it to you to take away the guilt of the community, to make atonement for them before ADONAI. 18 Look! Its blood wasn't brought into the sanctuary! You should have eaten it there in the sanctuary, as I ordered." 19 Aaron answered Moses, "Even though they offered their sin offering and burnt offering today, things like these have happened to me! If I had eaten the sin offering today, would it have pleased ADONAI?" 20 On hearing this reply, Moshe was satisfied.

DISCUSS...

- What do we learn about the role of the priests in this passage? Why is their role so important for the community as a whole? Think about the analogy of a doctor who treats contagious patients and then does not take precautions when joining other people.
- Why does Moses start talking about the offerings here? Is this what you would have expected to happen? Why or why not?
- What causes Moses to become angry here? How do you read this mysterious ending to the story?
- Why does Aaron argue back here, in contrast to his previous silence? What does he say and why does it satisfy Moses?

WRAP UP: Learning Outcomes for Priestly Leadership: Where Do We Go From Here?

Goals:

Learners will be able to...

- ⇒ Synthesize what they learned about the priestly model of leadership
- ⇒ Create concrete plans for these ideas to be applied in their congregation
- ⇒ Plan current and future ways for the congregation to implement a priestly leadership practice

Suggested Activities:

- ★ Ask learners to share some of the biggest takeaways for them from this text study experience.
  - o What was compelling about it?
  - o What did not resonate or seem relevant to you?
  - o Did anything surprise you?

- ★ Create a "Top 10" list of priestly leadership lessons for your community. You can do this as a group or have people do it individually and then have people share what they came up with on their own.

- ★ Review notes you took, plans you created, any other writing or artifacts that resulted from this learning. See if you can find any patterns, themes, or issues that came up multiple times for the group. Engage in a conversation around the results.

- ★ Have each person, rabbi(s) and lay leaders, find a way they want to implement the principles of leadership you studied and a plan for carrying it out.

- ★ Need more time? Want to dive deeper on one of the topics here? Check out the Suggested Activities sections to find ways to continue working and learning together.

- ★ Do a "text study" of one of your congregation's documents pertaining to priestly leadership (the mission statement, a strategic plan, committee structures, a programming calendar) to connect the big ideas of the biblical text to something the group can do or change together.

- ★ Set goals for implementing a priestly leadership practice with a specific timeline. Find time to check in, like 6 months or 1 year later, and create benchmark goals to track your progress.

- ★ Do a final text study, looking at Leviticus 19, the text that calls all Israelites to be holy. See how you can connect the ideas of holy behavior it outlines for a community with the vision of a priestly approach to leadership. How can using this leadership style or its values help us create a more holy community?