

- Why here? These mitzvot are picturing the normal life of the Believer, the goal of salvation, and this description gives us hope
 - the normal life is one of holiness and love for God and our neighbor (“love your neighbor as yourself” is found here, Lev. 19:18)
 - love is at the end; deeply intimate relationships are what we find at the end of the salvation pattern
 - many of these commandments in these portions deal with human relationships
 - after the death of the Three Weeks, after the 40 days of repentance, after Yom Kippur comes Sukkot, the mo’ed that more than any other celebrates communal life and love of neighbor, even love extended to the nations
 - on the other hand, the diversity of commandments here (including repetitions of the 10 commandments) indicates that the whole Torah is in view here; God is saying, “Stick with Me, and after this process is done, you will be keeping all of the Torah from a heart of love, and it’s going to affect all of your relationships from your family to your neighbor and beyond.”
 - (https://www.chabad.org/parshah/in-depth/default_cdo/aid/42608/jewish/Acharei-Kedoshim-In-Depth.htm Rabbi Levi, Midrash Rabbah)
- And God provides a constant refrain in this section that both instills the fear that motivates a child and offers encouragement: “I am the Lord,” or “I am the Lord your God.”
 - “I can make your life miserable if you don’t obey.”
 - “You CAN do this because I am holy, and you are created in My image!”
- You might be thinking your struggles are too vast.
 - Don’t base your faith on the size of the giants. Base your faith on the holiness of your God

God, the First Teacher

- In these portions, God first gives us a picture of His extreme holiness, helping us feel that holiness experientially through the description of the Yom Kippur service, a very narrow and detailed path for approaching Him. Then comes the command, “Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.”
 - first allow your students to experience what you’re teaching, then give them the principles by which that thing works, now that they have something tangible to grab onto

On “Living” Through the Mitzvot: A Practical Suggestion for the Omer Period

- “You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 18:5)
- What does it mean, “he shall live by them” or “he shall live in them”? R’Trugman brings several answers from the Sages (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KH0pLJS_Tg&list=PLYztuC2svlI7X5sbSV1gXW0U08NftkIF&index=13):

- most basic: living in the mitzvot means that our daily lifestyle is filled with keeping commandments
- Rashi adds: the life we shape living in the commandments here is the life we take with us in the world to come, so we live with them both here and there
- Gemara: these commandments are FOR LIFE, and so we don't put keeping a commandment ahead of life; we die rather than transgressing three commandments, however: murder, idolatry, adultery
- from the Ba'al Shem Tov: we should fill the commandments with life and joy and really LIVE through them in a holistic way that touches every part of us
 - R'Trugman makes a practical application to the Omer period: during these 49 days of the Omer, the way we are rectifying our middot (our personality, our characteristics, our very nature) is through PUTTING JOY INTO EVERY ASPECT OF OUR LIVES
 - Robin in this week's Parsing the Portion: the Sabbath, in particular, has the vital aspect to it of nurturing relationships, relationship with both God and others (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WoCc9LzgY98>)

On Circumcision of the Fruit Trees

- in the commandment regarding fruit trees, we find some layers that speak to this Spiritual Seasons study
- fruit from the first three years after planting is called "orlah," "uncircumcised," and is forbidden to eat; fruit from the fourth year is holy and is brought to Jerusalem; fruit from the fifth year can be eaten as other foods
- first: note that there is a progression of maturity described here, maturity of the fruit tree
- second: it's a story about overcoming "the flesh," which is implied when the text describes the forbidden early fruit as "orlah," "foreskinned"
 - the foreskin represents the flesh that constricts the flow of life, like Egypt
 - it must be "cut away," by allowing the early fruit to drop to the ground uneaten, or by removing the blossoms on the young trees in the spring
- fourth year: dedicate the tree to God, making all of its future harvests holy
 - this is vital because a holy people must only be sustained by holy food
 - there are levels of this process for making the food holy: Firstfruits makes the entire year's harvest holy; thanking God for our meal also has a role to play in this sanctification process
- fifth year: we may eat the fruit; the tree has taken on the mature service for which it was made
- connection to the calendar:
 - 3 Pilgrimage Festivals = 3 steps in removing the domination of the flesh
 - freedom from slavery
 - being given the Torah
 - having the Torah written on the heart
 - 4 = Hanukkah

- the festival of “dedication”
 - 5 = Purim
 - brings the dedication to its highest point, after which comes the “new normal,” the setting up of the Tabernacle on Nissan 1
 - so Purim marks the transition from growth to full maturity
- each salvation picture adds to the understanding of the big picture; each illuminates the others

Of Shells, Transgressions, and Azazels

- based on a R’Trugman teaching:
 - (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Hg81oSzNrg&list=PLYztuC2svll7X5sbSV1gXW0UO8NftkIF&index=14>)
- the rabbis speak of several levels of darkness, called “klipot,” “shells” or “husks”
 - darkness is not inherently evil, but darkness is the context evil requires to exist
 - we inherently understand that there are degrees of darkness out there in the world – some rooted in deeper evil than others
 - they describe 3 levels of darkness that we don’t go near, and a fourth level that is actually “transparent;” that which grows from the fourth level can either be turned to good purposes or evil
 - plural: “klipot,” singular: “klipa,” the fourth level is called “klipat noga.”
 - Israel is not told to evangelize Egypt but to run from that place (it draws its energy from the first three shells)
 - TV can be used for both good or evil (it draws its energy from the fourth shell)
 - application to fruit trees:
 - forsaking the fruit of the first three years is removal of the first three klipot
 - the fourth year can go either way; it is dedicated to God, and can be left or taken to Jerusalem and eaten there
 - application to circumcision of boys:
 - the removal of the foreskin is like the removal of the three darker shells
 - the thin membrane that is left (in my understanding) is peeled back but need not be entirely removed; peeling back is required for the circumcision to be considered kosher
 - what’s left is “the mark of the circumcision,” which is like step 5
 - application to the Yom Kippur text (Lev. 16)
 - three types of transgression laid on the “scapegoat:” avon, peshah, chatat (guilt, willful sin, sin) – these are the three darker klipot
 - springing from three levels of darkness
 - sin – missing the mark; just messing up
 - willful sin – darker, now we are intentionally messing up
 - guilt – darkest, what really separates us from God and others, as we don’t want to look into the eyes of others when we are guilty

- the rabbis connect the 3 times the word “Azazel” is mentioned in this part of the chapter to these three types of iniquity borne away by this goat (Grant: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdUdsdxyiR8>)
 - after the three are gone, there is a house cleaning and rededication for what remains, step 4
 - there is a fourth “Azazel,” later in the chapter, the verse that describes that when the man who leads the scapegoat out comes back, he is to WASH HIS CLOTHING AND BODY, and he can reenter the camp
- what we’re doing is lining up a number of progressions to see how they help to illuminate each other:
 - fruit tree progression, annual mo’edim, rabbis’ teaching about klipot, process of circumcision, the word “Azazel” and the types of transgressions put onto the scapegoat
 - each tells the same story from its perspective; these are all focused on what needs to be removed to allow life to flow out unhindered, the flow of the spirit, the seed, through the physical vessel

Focus on Yeshua and Joshua 22-24

- summary:
 - eastern tribes dismissed
 - they build a “witness” altar, almost causing a civil war
 - Joshua gathers the leaders to charge them in their leading
 - Joshua gathers the whole nation at Shechem before his death, mediating a renewal of the covenant
 - Joshua dies at 110 and is buried in Timnath-serah
- what the eastern tribes chose to build in an attempt to keep them connected to the rest of Israel is a replica of the altar
 - we can see here how central the Temple service was to Israel in their community life - they symbolize their entire involvement with God by their right to bring sacrifices at the Temple
 - F.B. Meyer: “The prompting motive was to cement the union between themselves and the other tribes. But that end would have been better served had they obeyed the divine command in assembling annually with them. You can secure unity, not by external symbols, but by spiritual affinity and fellowship.”
 - it is this kind of fellowship that the Torah has in mind in each of these many commandments in the double Torah portion
 - for those of us who are, in some ways, separated from each other in home fellowship groups, let this idea stated by Meyer be an encouragement to us: WE MUST BE VIGILANT TO ACTUALLY BE TOGETHER when those opportunities present themselves
 - a healthy body is one that connects together regularly in person; love requires real connection

- Lastly: we as a body will only be connected together if we stay focused on Yeshua
 - Joshua, a type of Yeshua, is able to gather the tribes together – no small task, but he demands that type of respect
 - if we stay united on Yeshua, we will not drift far from each other or from God

23 – Acharei Mot–Kedoshim & Joshua 22-24 – Transcript (not exact)

Welcome to Beth Tikkun and the Spiritual Seasons series. In these teachings, we explore the weekly Torah portions in the light of God’s spiritual curriculum for the year, fitting each portion into the bigger picture of the calendar and the salvation pattern more generally. This week we are in the double portion of Acharei Mot-Kedoshim, Leviticus chapters 16 through 20.

Acharei-Kedoshim Summary

Acharei Mot means “after the death,” as this portion starts out, “The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the LORD and died” (Leviticus 16:1). The first chapter is the detailed description of the Yom Kippur service. The next chapter emphasizes that sacrifices are only to be done at the Temple and that eating blood is prohibited. Chapter 18 contains the commandments regarding unlawful sexual relations.

“Kedoshim” means “holy ones,” and is taken from the verse, “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy [ones], for I the LORD your God am holy” (Leviticus 19:2). The portion contains dozens of commandments that run the gamut from the prohibition on idolatry to laws regarding peace offerings, laws against mediums, and the prohibition against eating the fruit of newly planted trees for three years. Many of the mitzvot here can be loosely grouped under the category of laws regulating social interactions—caring for the poor, just business dealings, honoring parents and the elderly, and consequences for sexual immorality. Kedoshim includes the vital commandment to love your neighbor as yourself, which is Leviticus 19:18.

The Yom Kippur Service

Last week we focused on the idea of the portions about the metzora coming at a time when God is helping us to lift the lid and see a bit better what’s going on inside, the darkness there. That’s what happens after we are raised to a new level, with more light, and it’s also a kind of preparation for a new work at Shavuot.

And in those portions, we saw how when someone’s tzara’at cleared up and went away, there was a procedure that God gave to pronounce the person clean. It involved two birds and a cedar stick, a scarlet thread, and hyssop. But this process is what is to happen after the tzara’at has already been cleared up. What made it go away in the first place? The key is repentance, teshuvah. Since tzara’at is firstly a spiritual disease, meaning the outer symptoms are really indicating something inside that’s out of whack, once a person is pronounced to be a metzora and is put outside the camp, they must begin an intense period of introspection and

repentance, teshuvah. And repentance doesn't only mean we express regret, but we actually begin acting on that regret. We do what it takes to change.

If repentance is the key to the healing, then from where does repentance get ITS power? It's this question that brings us to Acharei Mot and the Yom Kippur service. Declaring that repentance is the source of healing isn't quite reaching back far enough. That leaves the burden for our healing with us, OUR ability to repent. We know that all healing comes only through Yeshua. So here now, in parsha Acharei Mot, God is saying, "Don't worry; in the end, your healing doesn't rest on you. Your healing rests on the blood of My Son," the blood that is presented in the Holy of Holies at Yom Kippur. What we do as we repent is certainly important; this is what we offer to God to work the healing in our lives, the vessel we offer Him. But it is Yeshua's blood that pays the price for that healing. So, yes, we search inwardly, and we do the work of teshuvah, and we do the work of really meaning it with every fiber of our being and purposing to change and immediately enacting our plan to change and live differently. All of this is important as we show our hearts to God, but God will always be the prime mover in our salvation ("I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (1 Corinthians 3:6-7)). Ultimately it is God's action based on Yeshua's sacrifice that defeats sin and death in our lives.

It's interesting that Acharei means "after the death," "The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the LORD and died..." (Leviticus 16:1). And the Sages have wondered why their deaths need to be mentioned here. What comes after death? And we just had the chapters about the metzora. What comes after we contract tzara'at upon which we experience the death of banishment to the outskirts of the camp because sin brings death? Yom Kippur is what follows death.

The description of the Yom Kippur service isn't a repetition here. Leviticus 16 is the Torah's first and best description of the Yom Kippur service, the carrying away of the sins of the nation on the back of a goat sent into the wilderness and the presentation of blood in the Holy of Holies. We know that this is an earthly shadow of the real thing. In the end, repentance leads us to the blood of Yeshua.

And this is not only true of the metzora and any of us who repent. It's also true in the calendar. The Three Weeks in the high summer are a dying time, when even the earth turns yellow and dead. After the Three Weeks comes a turn to repentance. The rabbis say the whole month leading up to Yom Kippur, the month of Elul, which is the 6th month, is a WHOLE MONTH of repentance, and the first 10 days of Tishei, the 7th month, are days of especially intense repentance culminating in Yom Kippur. Again, repentance leads us to Yeshua and His act of sacrifice on our behalf.

As encouraging as it is to read about this atonement just after reading about the plight of the metzora, for the Believer in Yeshua, we have even more reason to be lifted up by the placement of the Yom Kippur service description in this spot in the Torah. We can be even more encouraged because we understand that this service is really an earthly reflection of a heavenly

service in which Yeshua, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the whole world, takes His own blood into the heavenly Holy of Holies, which provides a covering, then carries away humanity's sin like the goat sent out into the wilderness.

And going one step further, there's another aspect to this work happening here at Yom Kippur. Yes, we are healed of sin. But what has happened in the whole process of our falling and repentance and forgiveness is that WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SEE WHO GOD IS, His character, His overwhelming graciousness. He wants us to KNOW Him. It's about relationship. Our fall leads us eventually to the foot of the cross, and God says, "This is the kind of God I am. Come and get to know Me. Let's do this journey together."

And so it is that our descent is for a greater ascent. Why do we fall? We fall because in the recovery we go higher with God than before we fell. Yom Kippur is about restoration, but it's about more than that. It's about going higher. And I think this is partly what the haftarah is about in Amos, which is a description of God bringing Israel back to the Land and restoring the nation from the purified remnant He preserved. The descent is for a greater ascent. We see over and over again in Scripture that God brings a destruction on Israel and even on Israel's neighbors like Egypt, and after He describes the coming destruction, He says, "And they will know that I am the Lord" (see Ezekiel 30:26, for example). It's about knowing Him.

"Be Holy," Diverse Commandments

And then we have a whole section devoted to a great many mitzvot at the end of Acharei Mot and all through parsha Kedoshim; Kedoshim is one of the three portions with the most mitzvot, along with Ki Teitzei and Mishpatim. The three together contain more than a quarter of all the mitzvot in the Torah. What are these doing here?

I think the answer is that they are not just mitzvot: they are a picture of the normal life of the Believer, the goal of the process of salvation, and they are here to give us hope. They're showing us what comes at the end of repentance and the covering of the blood; the end goal is the normal life of the Believer, which is holiness and love toward God and others. The end result is not just that we are covered and not just that we know God's character better, but even beyond that, WE ARE PURGED OF OUR SIN such that we live a life based on love. LOVE is at the end. Be encouraged. It is God's plan for us, and as we walk with Him, we gain that life step by step. At the end is the selfless life, the free life where the animal soul is put second and the godly soul is put first, the life of deep relationships with God and others. Trust Him in this.

Notice that the commandments here mostly have to do with intimate relationships, and that's appropriate as a picture of the end goal. Deep relationship is what we find at the end of the salvation pattern.

After the death of the Three Weeks, after the 40 days of repentance, and after Yom Kippur comes Sukkot, the mo'ed that more than any other celebrates communal life and love of neighbor, even love extended to the nations.

On the other hand, though a large percentage focus on human relationships, not all of them do. This great list of commandments stretches into a wide-range of life situations and truly covers the gamut of Torah law. The Sages point out, for example, that each of the ten commandments is restated here in some way, and the ten commandments are, themselves, a summary of the Torah (https://www.chabad.org/parshah/in-depth/default_cdo/aid/42608/jewish/Acharei-Kedoshim-In-Depth.htm Rabbi Levi, Midrash Rabbah). That wide range is a clue to us that the whole Torah is in view here. And why is God giving us the whole Torah in miniature here? Because He's saying, "Stick with Me, and after this process is done, you will be keeping all of the Torah from a heart of love, and it's going to affect all of your relationships from your family to your neighbor and beyond." Let me say that again, God is saying, "Here is a picture of what your life will look like if you keep walking with Me – you will be keeping ALL OF THE TORAH FROM A HEART OF LOVE, and it's going to affect all of your relationships from your nearest family to distant family to your neighbor to your business contacts to your whole community and beyond."

And throughout this section of mitzvot, God is providing a kind of refrain that both puts a proper fear in us and offers us encouragement. The refrain is, "I am the Lord," or "I am the Lord your God." By repeating this every few verses, God is helping to give us the motivation a child needs (as in: do this or I will make your life miserable) and He's also saying, "You CAN do this because I am holy, and you are my creation made in my image, so you can be holy too!" He's saying that He won't stop working with us until we ARE holy. The verse that provides the name for parsha Kedoshim tells us exactly this message. Once again, that important verse says, "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" (Leviticus 19:2).

You might be thinking, "My struggles are too vast. These giants in my life will never be conquered." Don't base your faith on the size of the giants. Base your faith on the holiness of your God, the One Who created you. He will not stop until you have cut off the head of every one of those giants. He will not stop until you have stepped up onto the throne like King David did, eventually, after slaying Goliath. And He will place a crown of glory upon your head. It's not based on you or on your enemies but on Him and His holiness and the Lamb that He provides.

God, the First Teacher

As a bit of an aside, now, let's notice God's teaching technique here in these portions. God is the first Teacher, and the Torah is His textbook. So here in these portions, God doesn't only come right out and say, "I am holy, so you be holy," though He does that. First, He gives us an EXPERIENCE of His holiness, what that looks like and feels like practically as we attempt to approach Him at Yom Kippur. He shows us what that approach has to look like because of His holiness. What we are left with after reading them is the sense that God is so holy that there is just one very narrow way to approach Him and draw near to Him in the innermost chamber of His home. It's such a narrow path to approaching a holy God that we read pages of intricacies involved in the service, details the High Priest had to study and rehearse and rehearse and rehearse again. The priest's clothing has to be just right – holy clothes. Everything involved in approaching the holy God must be cleansed of the stench of death adhering to it. And so this is a great teaching picture to us of God's utter holiness.

And after showing us that, He says, “Be holy, for I am holy.” Wow! What a picture of holiness! And He’s telling us to be holy, LIKE THAT? We are to be clean and free of sin and death LIKE THAT? Well, take heart that if our Creator is commanding it, then yes, clearly we are able to get there, particularly because He helps us in getting there. But this is masterful teaching: show it first, then say it. Show what it is to be holy, then command it: “Be holy because I, your God, am holy.” Give the students the experience of it first. Make them feel it and function within it. Then give them the principles for how it works when they already have something tangible to grab onto. They can understand at that point because they have lived it a bit.

On “Living” Through the Mitzvot: A Practical Suggestion for the Omer Period

We’ll return to a bit later to the Yom Kippur service. For now, I’d like to skip forward to a verse in chapter 18, 18:5: “You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 18:5)

The Sages ask, “What does it mean to live by them?” or “to live in them,” “b’chai b’hem.” R’Trugman brings several answers, and one of them contains a practical suggestion for the Omer period, so I wanted to mention that one especially

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KH0pLJS_Tg&list=PLYztuC2svlI7X5sbSV1gXW0U08NftfKIF&index=13). But let me quickly list some of the truths given over time in answer to this question. One idea is that living in the mitzvot means that our daily lifestyle is filled with keeping commandments. We fill our days with accomplishing the mitzvot. Rashi goes a step further, says R’Trugman, in saying that since we build here the shape of our lives in the world to come, then if we live with the commandments here in this life, we will also be able to live by them in the next world. That is to say, the world to come is at least partly composed of the spiritual person we become here in this world, and that person is who we take with us when we pass on from here. And so if we train ourselves here to live by the commandments, then we take that life with us when we die. The Gemara takes a different approach, saying that these commandments are FOR LIFE, and so we don’t put keeping a commandment ahead of life. If someone holds a gun to your head and says, “Eat this pork or I’ll shoot,” then you eat the pork. There are only three commandments that we die rather than break, the commandments involving murder, idolatry, and sexual promiscuity.

But the main answer R’Trugman focuses on is an idea that has its origin in the Ba’al Shem Tov that when God says that we should live by the commandments, this means that we should fill the commandments with life and joy and really LIVE through them in a holistic way that touches every part of us. We shouldn’t do them joylessly like a machine or in such a disorganized way that they become nothing but stress. We shouldn’t do them just to get them done because we’re commanded to do them. The Slonimer Rebbe says that someone who lives out their life just meticulously doing the commandments but without life and without joy and without fire and passion in doing them, he merits the world to come, but when he gets there, he’ll only be a park bench. That’s what he said, meaning that if he only managed to craft a dull and utilitarian life here on earth through the commandments, then his life in the hereafter will also be dull and utilitarian. We must focus on bringing joy and life into our observance of the commandments.

And so R’Trugman connects this idea of focusing on doing the mitzvot with joy to the month of Iyar. Each month has a “chush” associated with it, a “sense,” or I call it a “bodily ability,” like sleep or eating or vision. The chush of Iyar is “thought.” This is an introspective month, and we’ve talked about how God helps us to lift the lid and see inside this month, and this is leading us to a deeper work at Shavuot. But R’Trugman points out that the letters in the word “machshevah,” which is the common Hebrew word for “thought,” can be rearranged to spell “b’simchah,” “in joy.” And so R’Trugman says the idea is that during these 49 days of the Omer, the way we are rectifying our middot – which he describes as our personality, our characteristics, our very nature – is through putting joy into every aspect of our lives. So let’s make that a focus for this Omer period, focusing on making sure that our observance of mitzvot is for life, and in life, and in joy, and in connection with others and with God. And in whatever ways we can beyond the mitzvot, let’s focus on making our lives joyful right now. Just make that choice. In Grant and Robin’s talk this week, Robin was talking about how the Sabbath, in particular, has the vital aspect to it of nurturing relationships, relationship with both God and others (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WoCc9LzgY98>). There’s a way to do the Sabbath that doesn’t nurture relationships, and there’s a way to do it that does.

On Circumcision of the Fruit Trees

Let’s turn now to the obscure-seeming commandment in chapter 19 regarding planting fruit trees in the Land. We’ll find here some layers that, maybe unexpectedly, speak to this Spiritual Seasons study.

The fruit from the first three years after planting is called “orlah,” “uncircumcised.” The law states that we are not to eat this fruit from the first three years. In the fourth year, the fruit is holy and is offered to the Lord. The fourth year fruit was taken to Jerusalem. Some say the owner would eat it there before the Lord, and some say that it was given to the priests. In text says that in the fifth year, the fruit can be eaten as other foods.

On the surface, this seems like a rather random law, a chok, inexplicable. And it is that. On the other hand, this law is one of those cases where we can see the salvation pattern peeking through without too much digging. Let’s see how we can see the salvation pattern here.

First of all, let’s note that the story here is about a journey to maturity for the tree, and this journey involves a kind of victory over the flesh, “flesh” in the sense of the spirit vs. the flesh. We don’t normally think of plants as having spirit and flesh. But this is the language that’s being used here when the Torah describes the forbidden early fruit as “orlah,” which literally means “foreskin.” The foreskin represents the flesh that constricts the flow of life, like Egypt, Mitzrayim. The fruit of the first three years is “foreskinned,” or “uncircumcised.”

God gives us the plan for circumcising the tree: allow any fruit from the first three years to drop to the ground uneaten. Alternatively, you can actually remove any flowers that grow on the tree in the first three years, which prevents fruit from forming and allows the plant to put its energies into developing its roots and branches.

There's more to this maturing process, however. In the fourth year, the fruit is holy. It is either left uneaten or, better yet, it is brought to Jerusalem and offered to the Lord. Why is this step so vital? It's vital because in offering these first edible fruits to God, the entire future harvests of the tree become holy. And why is that important? Because God's people are a holy people, and holy people are to be sustained only by holy food. The food must always be first dedicated to God, and in that way it becomes holy. This dedication is done in various ways. We see one of the ways fruit trees are dedicated to holiness here. But there are levels of dedication. Firstfruits near Passover is a means of dedicating the entire year's harvests to God. Each time we eat, we thank God for the food, and this thanksgiving also has a role to play in making the food holy and suitable for a holy people who do holy work in this world. We are not to be sustained by common food. We are to be energized and nourished by holy food that helps us to do holy deeds. Remember that this whole section of Scripture is marked by the command to be holy.

After this year in which the fruit is dedicated and made holy, the text mentions the fifth year, saying in the fifth year, we may eat it. At this point, the tree has taken on the mature service for which it was made. So we can say that there are 5 steps here, three involving circumcision, a fourth involving dedication to God, and a fifth that marks the beginning of the normal service for which the tree is intended.

Now if we recognize that everything in creation has the same development story, we can start to incorporate this particular development picture into the big picture. And that big picture is called salvation, Yeshua. Yeshua is the vessel, the Word, through which everything is made, so it all bears His mark, which is His story.

Let's connect this progression to the calendar. We have three pilgrimage festivals that God has clearly revealed to us, Unleavened Bread, Shavuot, and Sukkot; and these really mark three distinct mo'edim SEASONS. We can see these as three steps in removing the domination of the flesh. Those three steps are 1) being set free from slavery, 2) being given the Torah, and 3) having the Torah written on the heart.

So, what are numbers four and five in the calendar? Hanukkah marks four, and Purim marks five. And what is Hanukkah about? The word literally means "dedication." What is the fourth year for the fruit tree? It is the dedication of the fruit and the whole service the tree thereafter for God, making it holy, the dedication for holy purposes. And what happens in the Hanukkah story? The Temple is cleansed and rededicated to God, dedicated for holy service. Purim, number five, brings that dedication to God to its highest point of testing. After Purim comes the new normal, which is setting up of the Tabernacle on the first of Nissan. So Purim marks the transition from growth to full maturity.

Do you see that this seemingly random law given in three verses among a list of many other laws is shining forth with the story of salvation? It's amazing to see! And I can't say that I understand everything that's going on here. Each salvation picture adds to the understanding of the big picture. But we don't need to understand exactly how every detail fits. Now that God

has opened a new picture for us, we tuck it away in our brains. And what we find is that God will bring forth that picture when it is needed to provide clarity as we're chewing on another aspect or another picture of salvation. When it's needed, it comes forth to provide its light, and light shines upon light. It's one mirror shining light on another and receiving light from the other, too.

Of Shells, Transgressions, and Azazels

Let's go a bit further now; we'll end up connecting back around to Yom Kippur here. In teaching about the orlah commandment of the fruit trees, R'Trugman says that the rabbis talk about something that's almost like levels of impurity, though they're not quite that

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Hg81oSzNrg&list=PLYztuC2svll7X5sbSV1gXW0UO8NftfkIF&index=14>). They are more properly levels of darkness called "klipot," which literally means "shells" or "husks" (singular: "klipa"). The darkness isn't evil in itself, but evil can exist only if there is first darkness, so the darkness is providing the context for evil, and the evil derives its energy from the darkness. And so they talk of three levels. I think we inherently understand that there are degrees of darkness out there in the world. Some things we see and experience strike us as especially dark, while others are less obviously so. And along with these three levels, they mention a fourth that's a bit different; they describe it as a shell, but it's translucent, not opaque; this level is called "klipat noga." They think about these shells as being arranged over top of each other like layers of an onion. And R'Trugman says we don't mess with things that draw their energy from the first three levels of impurity. If something grows out of those levels, we don't try to redeem those things. We just run from them. And we can understand what he's talking about if we think about Egypt. Israel didn't stick around and try to evangelize the Egyptians; it was too dark, drawing its energy from a very dark place. Instead of telling Israel to evangelize Egypt, He told the nation to fasten their belts, put their shoes on, grab their staffs, and be ready to run. And so there are some aspects of the world that we don't go near. We don't go near illicit drugs, for example.

But then R'Trugman talks about the fourth shell that is transparent, and he says that things that grow out of this layer can go either way; that which comes from this level can be redeemed, or not. R'Trugman gives the example of the TV as coming from this level because it can go either way. He says that those in his group of Orthodox Jews, Chabad, don't own TVs. They have determined that there's too much potential for impurity and loss of time and life associated with them. But this doesn't mean that Chabad has completely sworn off this technology. On the contrary, Chabad produces a lot of video programming. They are quite deft at using this technology to get their message out and bring light into the world. And so they have taken a medium that grows out of the 4th shell, a medium that can go either way, and they have protected themselves against it even as they elevate it by using it for good purposes. There is balance in this way.

Now I'm not saying we can't own a TV. Certainly there is much good and educational and even spiritual programming that can come through the TV. We each need to find the right balance, but we have to be very careful with it because of its great power to suck you in like the sirens in the Greek tales. I think aliens looking down on the earth would wonder why most human

beings on the planet sit down in the evening and stare at a shiny screen, not interacting much, not accomplishing much. We have to be careful because of the great power there.

After gaining this understanding about how the rabbis are thinking about levels of darkness, darkness in which impurity finds a home and gets its energy, we can apply these ideas to other places. The first is obviously the fruit trees. Forsaking the fruit from the first three years of the fruit tree is like the removal of the first three shells for the tree in its circumcision process. We don't have anything to do with those layers, as they are too impure. The fourth shell, which can go either way, is like the fruit of the fourth year. It is not edible, but it can be made edible if it's taken to Jerusalem and dedicated to God. In the same way, TV can be dedicated to God.

R'Trugman also talks about the circumcision process of a boy. Now, if I knew anatomy a bit better, we could probably align the process of circumcision in some detail with the patterning we've been talking about. But R'Trugman draws the connection like this: he says that the foreskin must be discarded, removed. And he says this is like the first three levels of shells. We don't have anything to do with them. But then he adds that there's a fourth level with circumcision. There is a thin membrane (preputial epithelium) that is left after the foreskin is removed. Now, my personal understanding is that this layer must be pulled back in order for the circumcision to be considered kosher, but it's not necessary to remove it entirely; it is only pulled backward. And so, in a way, we can say that it is not until this final act of the circumcision is done that the child is fully DEDICATED to God through circumcision. On one level, it is through this act of circumcision that this boy is dedicated to covenant with God and a life of holiness. And R'Trugman goes on to say that what is left is the sign of the circumcision. It is a mark that is left on the boy for the rest of his life. And we can think of this as the mark of step 5.

I'm going to very quickly now throw in a couple of connections between this idea of the klipot and the Yom Kippur text in Leviticus 16. I actually find these connections to be particularly fascinating. In laying hands on the scapegoat, called the goat "to Azazel," the priest is to confess over it three types of iniquity, which the scapegoat then removes as it is sent out into the wilderness. We find these in verse 21: "And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness" (Leviticus 16:21). The three types of impurity that the scapegoat bears away in Hebrew are "avon," "pesha," and "chatat." And we can think of these three as layers of uncleanness that must be removed. And Grant points out in this week's Parsha Seasonings video that the rabbis notice that the name "Azazel" occurs three times in the first part of the chapter (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdUdsdxyiR8>). And so the rabbis connect together the three types of impurities to the three times the name Azazel is mentioned in that part of the chapter. "Sin," "chatat," is missing the mark; you aimed and missed. Darker than that is "pesha," which is willful sin; now you're choosing to miss the mark. And darker than these is "guilt," "avon," which is where real separation takes hold. It is our guilt that separates us from God and others. We don't want to look into the faces of others when we are guilty.

When all of these shells are gone, there is a house cleaning for what remains, which are the aspects of the flesh that can go either way. These are cleansed and rededicated for holy purposes. And, in fact, it's interesting that we find a fourth mention of the name Azazel later in the chapter. It's mentioned after the man has brought the goat to Azazel out to the wilderness and pushed it over a cliff. When this man comes back, says the verse, he has to wash his clothing and his body, and he can straight away enter the camp. So this, too, aligns.

Now, you see what I'm doing here is lining up a number of different progressions and teachings next to each other: we've got the fruit tree progression, the annual mo'edim, the rabbis' teaching about the klipot, the process of circumcision, and the word "Azazel" and the listing of transgressions that are put on it in the Yom Kippur service. Now, our understandings of how all these reflect each other becomes honed over time. But at the least, what we can sense here just in this little time we've spent today with it is that each of these pictures is, in fact, telling the same story, and that's the story of salvation. And GOD IS VERY SPECIFIC with how He tells this story. He is CONSISTENT with the telling of it. And in truth, this is because it all reflects one person, His Son, the Messiah Yeshua. Each picture is consistent with the others, though each comes from its own perspective, its own world. These pictures here today all have in common perspectives on what needs to be removed to allow life to flow out unhindered, the flow of the spirit of life, the seed, through the vessel like streams of living water flowing to a dry and thirsty world. These pictures are all dealing with circumcision and the removal of shells that keep us closed in.

Focus on Yeshua and Joshua 22-24

Let's turn now to the final three chapters of Joshua, chapters 22-24, and we'll also include a focus on Yeshua here as we address these chapters. In chapter 22, Joshua dismisses the eastern tribes to return to their homes. On their way over the Jordan, however, they build a replica of the Tabernacle altar, which almost causes a civil war. In the end, the eastern tribes convince Joshua that they were not trying to set up an alternative place of sacrifice but instead were trying to solidify their standing with God in the eyes of the other tribes by building a reminder that says, "We, too, have a portion in the Temple service, and we, too, have a portion in the Lord, the God of Israel. We are part of Israel, too." They call the altar "Witness." In chapter 23, Joshua calls the leaders of the tribes to himself, the elders and heads and judges and officers, but not the entire nation, charging these leaders to be very strong to keep and do all the commandments written in the Torah of Moses and to be careful to love the Lord their God and to shun idolatry. In chapter 24, the final chapter of the book, Joshua does finally gather the entire nation to Shechem as the end of his life draws near. He reviews their history and tells them to choose this day who they will serve, famously saying, "...as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Joshua mediates there a renewal of the covenant between God and Israel. We then have the record of Joshua's death at 110 years old. He is buried at Timnath-serah in Ephraim.

The eastern tribes have done their duty and can finally return to their families. I find it interesting that what the eastern tribes chose to build in an attempt to keep them connected to the rest of Israel is a replica of the altar. One thing we can see here is just how central the

Temple service was to Israel in their community life. The eastern tribes use this service at the Temple as the symbol of their portion in the Lord. Let me say that again: they symbolize their entire involvement with God by their right to bring sacrifices at the Temple. It's fascinating.

It's well and good to build a memorial as a witness to your connection to God and Israel. But the main way they were to stay connected was through the three annual pilgrimage festivals. Real connection doesn't come through gestures of connection, reminders of connection, but through actual physical connection and, better yet, through serving each other in love. F.B. Meyer states this idea in his commentary, saying, "The prompting motive was to cement the union between themselves and the other tribes. But that end would have been better served had they obeyed the divine command in assembling annually with them. You can secure unity, not by external symbols, but by spiritual affinity and fellowship."

And it is this kind of fellowship that the Torah has in mind in each of these many commandments in the double Torah portion. None of these commandments are necessary if we're not actually encountering each other, engaging with each other.

For those of us who are, in some ways, separated from each other in home fellowship groups, let this idea stated by Meyer be an encouragement to us: we must be vigilant to actually be together when those opportunities present themselves, both in our home fellowships, our corporate services, at the mo'edim, and in the other ways we are organizing to get our people together. It's important. We all sometimes feel the pull to just rest or even sometimes to isolate a bit. And those things are healthy sometimes. But let's let Joshua and these Torah portions speak to us today the message that a healthy body is one that connects together regularly in person. Love requires real connection.

Lastly, let me add that we as a body will only be connected together if we stay focused on Yeshua. We have said many times that the name "Joshua" is the origin of the name "Yeshua" and that Joshua is one of the clearest biblical pictures of Yeshua. I find it notable here in these final chapters that Joshua is able to gather the whole nation together, and he goes to the trouble to do it. It's not a small thing to leave your homes and crops and your animals to travel. And we see that in the generations after Joshua's generation, Israel will often have trouble rallying tribes to help fend off invaders, for example. But Joshua commands that kind of respect. In chapter 23, we see him gathering all the leaders together, and in chapter 24, he gathers the whole nation together. And he speaks powerful words to them. And he forces them to respond to him with their own mouths that they will be faithful to the Lord. It's a moving scene.

My final point here, as we draw this Joshua study to a close, is that if we stay united on Yeshua, we will not drift far from each other or from God. Yeshua will keep us focused on walking with God in balance and with love.

We'll end it there for today. Thanks again for listening. May God make us a people who look to Yeshua for our salvation from beginning to end and who cling to Him as He leads us in walking with the Lord. And may we rise up to be the people He has made us to be. Shalom.