

Keeping Yourself Clean in a Dirty World

Message for Parashah 26, Sh'mini

by Kevin Phipps

Before I was Torah Observant, eating was so much easier. I just ate what I wanted without any concern for whether my burger had bacon on it or not, whether my hot dogs were turkey or pork, or what kind of fish I was eating. I had to totally redefine my concept of pizza, one of the primary American food groups. What's the difference anyway? Why would God care about such things? He created all things, so why would some things be kosher, and other things not? In fact, all the clean and unclean laws are a bit confusing. So grab locust kabobs, which oddly enough are actually kosher, and put down your marshmallows, which may not be kosher, depending on how you interpret the Hebrew word for flesh, and I will try to make some sense of all this for you.

In the beginning was God. God is light. God is holy. God is pure. God is clean, very clean. There was also Ha Satan. Ha Satan is the ruler of the kingdom of darkness, out of which comes all forms of death, decay, destruction, disease, corruption, hatred, and impurity. Ha Satan is dirty, very dirty. On the first day of Creation, God made a distinction between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. The light of the first day came not from the sun, which had not been created yet, but God. Creation, without the effects of sin, was clean, all of it.

However, with the sin of Adam and Havah, the corruption of the kingdom of darkness infiltrated all of Creation, defiling it, and making certain parts of it impure. Death, decay, and disease were then part of the world we live in. Such parts of the world which are in a state of such impurities are considered unclean. Anything which comes in contact with such unclean things, becomes unclean also. This provides the background behind the clean and unclean laws. With me so far? I hope so, because now it starts getting complicated.

Have you ever noticed that the kosher laws only relate to living creatures which can be consumed by mankind? If you are a vegetarian, the kosher laws would be much easier to follow. Why would this be? The death of a living creature, whether done at the tabernacle or not, is technically a sacrifice. It involves the death of a living creature. All life is precious to God, so a sacrifice of a living creature should not be performed without good reason. God does not tell us not to eat meat, but because eating meat involves a sacrifice, there must be rules to go with it to prevent the loss of such life being taken lightly.

Now let us take a look at the passage just prior to the kosher laws.

“Then Moshe carefully investigated what had happened to the goat of the sin offering and discovered that it had been burned up. He became angry with El'azar and Itamar, the remaining sons of Aharon, and asked, "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 YHVH . Look! Its blood wasn't brought into the sanctuary! You should have eaten it there in the sanctuary, as I ordered." -

Vayikra/Leviticus 10:16-18

When an Israelite came to the tabernacle with a sin offering, the priest acted as a representative, kind of like a lawyer, of the offerer before God. The animal brought to be sacrificed on the altar took on the sin of the offerer, and was then sacrificed. The shedding of the animal's blood ended the animal's life, but provided atonement for the offerer. In the above passage, the sacrifice is then declared holy. This would indicate that as the offering is accepted by God, the sin is at that point gone, otherwise the sacrifice could not be declared holy. Though the sin is gone, the guilt for the sin is not. The priest, representing the offerer before God, then consumes the sacrifice in the tent of meeting, in the presence of God, removing the guilt, and providing atonement for the offerer. The priest can also represent the entire nation as in the above passage.

Is it an accident that the kosher laws for the people comes right after this description of the priests consuming holy sacrifices for the atonement of Israel? The holiness of the offering was passed from the offering to the priest and whomever he represented. In the same way, the uncleanness of unclean sacrifices passed on to whoever eats it. The sin and burnt offerings in this parashah are part of the consecration of the priests. The kosher laws, if followed, consecrated the people, as we see at the end of the parashah. I see here a link between the meat offered on the altar to God for atonement, and the meat eaten in daily life as a sacrifice, perhaps not for atonement, but for a continued reminder for us of the difference between the world of light and the world of darkness. Though there are foods eaten that were not used as sacrifices on the altar, before we kill a creature to eat it, thus bringing it into the temple of the Holy Spirit, which is our body, it must at least be clean.

Would you eat decaying, rotting, roadkill that has been baking in the sun for a week? You wouldn't, but a pig would. It is not hard for us to see all sorts of uncleanness associated with the roadkill, but when it comes to some sizzling bacon in a frying pan that smells oh so good, it is a little harder to see that. However, when pigs eat such things as roadkill, the obvious uncleanness of the roadkill is passed on to the pig. The implications of this may be more than spiritual. There are actual health concerns associated with this as well. If you have heart disease, the first thing a doctor will take you off of is pork and shellfish. Cows eat living grass. Nothing rotting or disgusting. Cows are kosher, assuming you drain the blood out of them first. Similar connections can be made for fish, birds, and even insects, if you study the dietary habits of such creatures and their purpose in creation.

When it comes to the kosher food laws, these are clean laws we can control. There are other forms of uncleanness we cannot control. We live in a dirty world, and we cannot live in this world without some of the dirt of the world rubbing off on us. I work on a flightline with aircraft . It is impossible to do my job, even if I do it right, without getting dirty. It has been said that you know you are a crew chief if you wash your hands before going to the bathroom. Besides dirt, we also come in contact with toxic chemicals, like engine oil, hydraulic fluid, jet fuel, solvents, cleaners, and sealants. We have to wear protective clothing from such chemicals, as many are carcinogens, flammable, and even fetal hazards for women. In a spiritual sense, the world we live in is just as hazardous. The first thing I do when I come off the flightline is change my clothes and wash my hands. We need to be able to do the same kind of washing, to cleanse ourselves from the unavoidable uncleanness of the world.

“Yeshua answered her, "If you knew God's gift, that is, who it is saying to you, 'Give me a drink of water,' then you would have asked him; and he would have given you living water."

- Yochanan/John 4:10

“Now on the last day of the festival, Hoshana Rabbah, Yeshua stood and cried out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him keep coming to me and drinking! 38 Whoever puts his trust in me, as the Scripture says, rivers of living water will flow from his inmost being!" 39 (Now he said this about the Spirit, whom those who trusted in him were to receive later -- the Spirit had not yet been given, because Yeshua had not yet been glorified.)” - **Yochanan/John 7:37-39**

Living water is used for ritual cleansing. It is any natural occurring body of water, like rain, rivers, lakes, oceans, and so on. It has a unique property in that anything unclean that comes in contact with it becomes clean, at least in a spiritual sense. The Holy Spirit living within us cleanses us from all the dirt of the world. We are not to carelessly wallow in the world's muck, but neither do we need to fear a little dirt getting on us either. Like I said, it is unavoidable. That is what the mayim chayim of the Holy Spirit is for.

In Yeshua's time, lepers were not only unclean, but had to wear bells and announce, “Unclean!” as they walked through the streets. Nobody would dare come anywhere near a leper much less touch them with their bare hands. Yeshua did. When He did, as the living water that He was, not only did He not become unclean, but the leper would become clean, and healed of his leprosy. Yeshua also communed with other “untouchables” of His society, like prostitutes and the Israeli IRS, otherwise known as tax collectors. He praised the work of the good Samaritan, who picked up and cared for a man beaten, and left for dead, after two Jewish leaders previously saw the man and passed to the other side of the street. Later, Kefa/Peter was going to go to the house of Cornelious to eat and commune with a Gentile, another one of the unclean to the Jews. God used a vision of a sheet with unclean animals on it and the instruction to eat to teach Kefa that it was good for him to go to Cornelious' house to share God's light with Him and encourage him in the faith. Paul declared that he had become all things to all men, so by all means, he may win some to God's Kingdom. Likewise, as we go about the service of God in the world, we will have to be willing to get our hands dirty in order to pull people out of the swamps of the world.

It is because of the grime of the world, and the filth we get into as a servant of God, that it is important to create sanctuaries of cleanness and cleansing in the midst of it. There are three different kinds of sanctuaries that we build. The first is a prayer closet. This is the most important of them, as it is where we commune with our Father in heaven. We see Yeshua, after a day of ministry and teaching in the world, going alone to the top of a hill to His prayer closet to talk to His Father. Our prayer closet can be an actual closet or room, or a mobile variety with the prayer shawl.

The second sanctuary is our home. Here we commune with those we call family. There are few things that feel better than to come home from the dirty flightline to a clean home. After all the vulgarity that is shoved in my ears all day a work, it is nice to come home and hear words of encouragement and praise. I don't have control over what I find in the world, but I do have control over what is in my home. I have had people come to my home and feel comfortable. They sense peace even with four kids there. My home is not just a place to hang my hat and rest my head. It is a sanctuary for me, my family, and all who come to visit.

You are presently in the third kind of sanctuary. It is the local congregation of believers in Yeshua. This is a community, which serves one another, and comes together to worship God. If you are here, which I can verify that you are, you are not here by accident. You are here because you have two things. Not one of two things, but both of them. You have at least one need, and you have at least one gift. We have something you need, and you have something we need. As each member of this congregation gives what they are able to the congregation, there is a larger pool of resources available for the needs of each member of the congregation. In fact, if each member is truly giving what they can, making sacrifices and priority adjustments where necessary, the pool not only fills up to meet the needs of the congregation, but overflows like streams of living water into the community, to make the world outside this sanctuary a little bit cleaner. This is outreach. The Great Commission applies just as much to Messianic congregations as any other community of Believers. However, effective outreach cannot take place until, we in-reach first, make the well full.

In this parashah, we see the importance of staying clean as best we can. We do not always have control of the circumstances we find ourselves in, and at times we are even called to get dirty to share the love of God with people. There are things we do have control over, such as what we eat, and as much as we can we ought to keep ourselves clean. We are called to walk in the light as God is in the light. In this world, dirt happens, and when it rubs off on us, we go to the sanctuaries we create, and make ourselves clean. As often as we can, we need to bathe in the refreshing living waters of the Holy Spirit.