

Parashah Sixty-Six

Exodus 29:1–49; Isaiah 61:7–62:5; Hebrews 2:10–18

notes by Tim Hegg

Filling the Hands of Aaron & His Sons

Our *parashah* this Shabbat outlines the “ordination” of Aaron and sons as the priests to HaShem. It is instructive for us to remember that the Hebrew usually translated “ordain” is לְמַלֵּא יָדַיִם, “to fill the hands.” In fact, the sacrifice described as the ordination offering is also called the מְלֵאִים, “filling” offering. What does it mean to “fill the hands” when describing the ordination of Aaron and his sons to the priestly office of service? It no doubt emphasizes that the service to which they were ordained was not for themselves, but for others. They were to have their hands full of the offerings the Israelites would bring. Their energies and work would be for the benefit of others, not themselves.

The same lesson is emphasized by the use of unleavened breads in the offerings of ordination. In this case, as in the Pesach offerings, unleavened cakes describe the situation of servanthood, while leavened bread (prescribed in the Shavuot offering) symbolizes the life of freemen whose time is their own, and who can therefore wait for bread to rise before baking. The priestly life is one of service to others, not to self. The priests would not have an inheritance in the Land, nor would they have their own means of support—they would have to depend upon the obedience and faithfulness of the people they served for their food and support.

We should be careful in making applications from this passage not to fall into the trap into which the emerging Christian Church fell prey, i.e., thinking that this describes the leaders of the believing congregation, whom they called “priests” as well as “fathers.” For the typological application of Aaron and his sons is not to the leaders of the believing congregation, nor to the congregation itself, but to Yeshua specifically who alone is our High Priest. If we look carefully at the specific ceremony detailed for the inauguration of the High Priest we are confronted once again with Mashiach and His unique work.

Note that the first action taken upon Aaron and his sons is that they are washing in a *mikveh* (29:4). This is a symbol of purity, of ritual acceptance to do the work to which they are being ordained. When Yeshua first emerges to do His public work he requests that John the Baptizer officiate at His public *mikveh*. He is visibly being inaugurated as a priest Who would engage in the business of atonement for His people.

After clothing the priests in the vestments, then oil was to be put upon them as an anointing (וּמָשַׁחְתָּ אֹתוֹ, *umashachta 'oto*, “and you shall anoint him”). They were to be *meshuchim* (cf. Num 3:3), anointed ones foreshadowing Mashiach, the Anointed One. When Yeshua came up out of the water of the *mikveh*, the Ruach descended upon Him in the form of a dove (the sacrifice described for the very poor, cf. Lev 14:30). His anointing by the Ruach once again marks Him as being ordained for His priestly function. Psalm 133 describes the oil of anointing upon Aaron’s head, running down upon his beard and upon his robes. When the Head is anointed, the body is likewise anointed.

The next activity in the ordination process of Aaron and his sons was a sacrifice for their own iniquity (29:10-14). The writer to the Messianic Jews (Hebrews) makes it clear that Yeshua needed no sin-offering for His own sins, for He was without sin (7:27ff).

Two rams were set apart for the inauguration of the priests: one as a whole-burnt offering (עֹלָה, *'olah*) and one as a wave-offering (תְּנוּפָה, *tenuphah*). The whole burnt offering is an offering of complete and full dedication to HaShem. This in every way characterized the life of Yeshua. From His earliest years when He recognized that the Father’s purpose in Him was His divine priority (Luke 2:49), to His final submission to death, His life was in every way characterized as an *'olah*.

The *tenuphah* (wave-offering) is specifically described as a “sweet smelling aroma” to HaShem. The *tenuphah* signals the acceptance of the offering before God, an offering which He willingly accepts and is therefore satisfied with its outcome. Do we not hear the *bat kol* (heavenly voice) of

HaShem directed to Yeshua: “This is the Son I love, listen to Him” (Matthew 17:5)? Yeshua as the High Priest to HaShem is a “sweet smelling aroma,” His life of holiness and purity was, in every way, befitting the Father He served.

From this second ram, the *tenuphah* offering, the blood was to be put upon the lobe of the right ear, upon the right thumb and the right big toe. In this case, the application of the blood signals dedication, or sanctification unto HaShem. The ear attaches to the Hebrew concept of “hearing” which signifies “to obey.” The priest would thus listen to the words of God and perform them. Blood on the ear bespeaks obedience to God and Yeshua is the only perfect example of that. All that He “heard” He did. His “ear” was in every way perfectly sanctified.

The blood of the *tenuphah* offering was also put on the right thumb and the right big toe. In ancient times, conquering enemies would sever thumb and toe to debilitate their captives. The thumb and toe were recognized as necessary for one’s full ability to carry out life’s tasks. The thumb governs the work of the hands, and the big toe makes the feet strong for work. Putting blood on each signified that the work of hands and feet were to be sanctified to HaShem. The Priest’s life-energies were to be expended in service to the Lord.

How well we see this exemplified in our High Priest, Yeshua. He clearly stated that He did not do what He desired, but He did all that the Father spoke (John 8:28,38; 14:10,31). All that was symbolized in the inauguration of Aaron is realized in the life of Yeshua.

But it is not only realized in His life, but also in His death. Consider the agony of the Incarnate One, mystery beyond our comprehension: Son of God, son of man. “And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.” (Matt. 26:39) Here the sanctified One obeys even to the point of death, and death on an execution stake. His obedience is perfect. “Having loved His own, He loved them fully” (John 13:1).

The fat of the *tenuphah* ram is put upon the altar and burned up in a quick flash of flame to HaShem (29:22ff). In this sacrificial display the full inner angst of dedication is symbolized. See in this the words of Yeshua’s cry from the execution stake, “it is finished.”

But the *tenuphah* is not entirely consumed. The priest would receive his due: the breast and the right-thigh, the choice portions of the sacrifice would belong to the priest for his food, for his enjoyment, for his sustenance.

Consider the remarkable words of the Epistle to the Messianic Jews in Heb 12:2, “fixing our eyes on Yeshua, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Here the phrase “who for the joy set before Him” should be translated “who in exchange for the joy set before Him,” the Greek word ἀντὶ, *anti*, having its primary meaning “instead of,” “in the place of,” and is used in this way in v. 16 where Esau gives his birthright *for* (“in exchange for”) a bowl of soup. Thus, Yeshua exchanges the sufferings of the cross for the joy set before Him—His portion, what He receives from the sacrifice. And His portion is nothing less than the people for whom He died, who would forever be His. It may be difficult to comprehend, but we are the “joy” for which He was willing to suffer. It is in this that we find our true “self-worth,” for we are the joy of His heart, redeemed by His blood, purified by His intercession, and made ready for eternity with Him in the world to come.

Note carefully that not only does the Priest enjoy his portion of the *tenuphah* offering, but all who obtain atonement by the sacrifice also eat of it. The only one who is excluded is the foreigner (זָר, *zar*), the one outside of the covenant. The place of forgiveness, the place of atonement—the place of fellowship and shalom is only within the covenant, not outside of it. Only covenant members can partake of the life the High Priest offers in the sacrifice. “I am the way, the truth, and the life—no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6).

The *parashah* ends with a description of the תְּמִידָה, *tamid* (daily) offerings. Why? Why are these put next to the ordination of Aaron and his sons? Because the lessons learned from that event are to be rehearsed every day—the coming of the High Priest was to be the central event in all of the daily activities in the Temple. The whole story is about Yeshua—the entire priestly service was

given as a foreshadow of the Messiah. If we miss this, we miss the primary and most important lessons God intends us to see in the Tabernacle and Priesthood.

Ordination of Leaders

As noted above, the primary lesson we are to learn from the ordination of the Aaronic priest is that of Yeshua's own unique position as our *cohen gadol* (high priest). But we should not overlook the fact that in God's historic unfolding of His plan of redemption, revealed through the Tabernacle and Temple, and the priestly service that took place there, He selected men (priests) to serve the people, and He did so by setting them apart through the ceremony of ordination ("filling the hands"). Similar rituals of setting apart leaders and kings are noted as well. Kings were anointed (1Sam. 15:1; 2Sam. 2:4; 5:3; 1Kings 1:34; 19:15-16; 2Kings 23:30; Psa. 18:50) as were prophets (1Kings 19:16; 1Chr. 16:22; Psa. 105:15) in public ceremonies.

In an interesting ceremony, Moses, just before he dies, passes his authority to Joshua:

Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit (Spirit?) of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses. (Deut 34:9)

Here, the laying of Moses' hands upon Joshua, symbolically endowed him with the authority to lead the people of Israel in the place of Moses. The text makes it clear that the endowment of the "Spirit of wisdom" to Joshua came as a result of Moses laying his hands upon him (בִּיָּסֵמֶךְ מֹשֶׁה) (אֶת־יָדָיו עָלָיו). [All of the English translations use a lower-case "s" on "spirit," but it seems warranted, in the context, and with other biblical parallels, that we should understand the word here to be speaking of the רֹּחַ אֱלֹהִים, *ruach Elohim*, the Spirit of God.] The verb סָמַךְ, *samach*, means "to lean upon," an act that symbolically transferred the "weight" of one's authority to another person. Numbers 27 also describes the ceremony of commissioning Joshua:

18 So Adonai said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; 19 and have him stand before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and commission [צִוֶּה] him in their sight. 20 You shall put some of your authority on him, in order that all the congregation of the sons of Israel may obey him. 21 Moreover, he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before Adonai. At his command they shall go out and at his command they shall come in, both he and the sons of Israel with him, even all the congregation." 22 Moses did just as Adonai commanded him; and he took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. 23 Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned [צִוֶּה] him, just as Adonai had spoken through Moses.

Here, then, Moses commissions Joshua to stand "in his place." The people were to accept the leadership of Joshua as equal to that of Moses. It would seem evident that the ceremony of "laying on of hands" was taken from the same action done when one brought a sacrifice (e.g., Lev 1:4). When the offerer "laid hands" upon the head of the sacrificial animal, he was symbolically transferring himself upon the animal, so that the animal now represented the one bringing the offering. In the same way, when Moses laid hands upon Joshua, he was stating that Joshua would now rule in his stead.

This ceremony of Moses' laying hands upon Joshua became the template for later rabbinic ordination. Using this same ritual as their guide, the Sages also ordained or commissioned their students through the "laying on of hands," called סְמִיכָה, *s'michah*, from the same verb סָמַךְ, *samach*, "to lean upon." Though there is no clear evidence that such an ordination ceremony was extant among the Sages of the 1st Century, it is clear that so-called "rabbinic ordination" was common by the Talmudic era. The point of Rabbinic ordination is that when the Sage ordained his disciple, he gave to that disciple the right to speak *in his name*. Thus, even if the disciple were to teach something that his mentor had never taught, it was to be received *as though* his mentor had, in fact, taught it. Of course, a disciple would never think of absolutely contradicting the mentor who had ordained him. If it appeared that he had contradicted his mentor, later interpreters went to great

lengths to show that the two were, in reality, non-contradictory.

It is interesting to parallel the times in the Apostolic Scriptures where the idea of “laying on of hands” is found with the ordination of Joshua by Moses. Throughout the book of Acts, for instance, the laying on of hands conferred gifts of the Spirit. Note the following examples:

Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:17)

So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, “Brother Saul, the Master Yeshua, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 9:17)

When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Master Yeshua. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. (Acts 19:5–6)

The obvious background to these texts are the examples of “laying on of hands” found in the Tanach, and in our Torah *parashah* specifically. Even as Moses’ commissioning of Joshua resulted in Joshua being “filled with the Spirit of wisdom,” in order to fulfill the office to which he was being appointed, so the similar events noted in Acts resulted in the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

In the Pauline epistles, we find notice that Timothy was commissioned by the “laying on of the hands of the council of elders” (1Tim 4:14; 2Tim 1:6). Interestingly, by this ceremony, Timothy received a “spiritual gift,” apparently given to him for the task to which he had been appointed, namely, carrying on the apostolic duty of teaching and training teachers in the Apostolic message (1Tim 1:3ff; 2Tim 2:1ff). Likewise, Paul and Barnabas are commissioned for their mission through the laying on of hands by the leaders at Antioch:

While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. (Acts 13:2–3)

Thus, in the Apostolic Scriptures, we see that the pattern first begun by Moses commissioning Joshua is followed in the commissioning of men for leadership positions and ministry within the messianic communities. The post-destruction rabbinic Judaism incorporated a similar ceremony of ordination for those men granted teaching authority. The biblical “laying on of hands” apparently accomplished two things: 1) it endowed the man with the spiritual gifting necessary for his appointed tasks, and 2) it publicly commissioned or ordained him with the authority to accomplish his duties.

We should note several important aspects in the commissioning or ordaining of men for leadership and mission. First, there were no “lone rangers.” Joshua did not rise to leadership by his own prowess or campaign. He received his commission from Moses at the direct command of God. Likewise, the men chosen to care for the widows in Acts 6 were commissioned by the Apostles. They did not personally take the responsibility upon themselves. And even Paul and Barnabas were duly commissioned by the leaders of the congregation that sent them forth. In the same manner, Timothy was commissioned by the council of elders (perhaps from Lystra, Acts 16:1ff) for the work he was to do at Ephesus. Thus, the authority of leadership within the believing community is conferred by the existing leaders and community itself—it is not something anyone can rightfully obtain on his own.

Second, those ordained to positions of leadership or ministry are chosen because they have demonstrated the necessary character and giftings to accomplish the task. The men chosen in Acts 6 were those who were “full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task” (Acts 6:3). In like manner, Timothy was admonished to find “faithful men” (2Tim 2:2) to whom he could entrust the Apostolic message and *halachah*.

Third, the commissioning of men to leadership and ministry was a recognition that God had appointed them for this task. When Moses laid his hands upon Joshua, it was because God had chosen Joshua to take Moses’ place. And when Paul and Barnabas were commissioned for their mission, it was because the Holy Spirit had indicated that He had separated them (sanctified them)

for this task. Thus, ordination to leadership and ministry is first and foremost a public recognition of the evident will of God for the one ordained. His commission is first and foremost from God as it is recognized and thus verified by the community.

Finally, the ordination of a man to a position of leadership or ministry is part of the necessary equipping of that man for the duties to which he is commissioned. Timothy received a “spiritual gift” as a result of the laying on of hands by the council of elders, and Joshua received the “Spirit of wisdom” through his ordination by Moses. I take this to mean, not that Joshua lacked the presence of the Spirit before his ordination, but that by the laying on of hands, he received the confirmation of God Himself, and was therefore assured that the Spirit would aid Him in completing his duties. I would think that the same was true for Timothy. Thus Paul reminds Timothy of his having been commissioned by the laying on of hands (2Tim 1:6), a commissioning that confirmed God’s pleasure in the matter, and he could therefore be confident that God would provide divine help and assistance for his work. As such, a man who is commissioned to the task of leading God’s people must see his duties as first and foremost the fulfillment of a divine appointment. This being the case, in the same way that a man is commissioned to an office of leadership by authority outside of himself, so he is not free to leave that position of responsibility apart from being released by those same authorities. The phenomenon common in our day in which leaders, from their own desires and initiative, move from one congregation to another, finds no basis in the Scriptures.

In summary, then, God is pleased to use common people, equipped through the gifting of His Spirit, to accomplish His work and purposes. In the case of those who take on leadership positions, the authority they acquire as leaders is bestowed through the public recognition of God’s will in appointing them as leaders, being ordained to their tasks by the existing leadership and confirmed by the voice of those they lead.