

## RECYCLED KINGDOM

### A Devotional Meditation on Ki Tisa (When You Take)

Exodus 30:11-34:35; 1 Kings 18:1-39  
Luke 22:23-31; Acts 5:1-11; 1 John 4:7-10

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*Recycled crown? Photo by Andrew, October 26, 2008, [via Flickr](#).*

Recycling is a way of life. Rather than throw away things we no longer find useful, we are supposed to sift through used stuff and separate items that could find a new use. That sounds good in theory, but it's difficult to get into the habit of recycling, and some things just don't recycle well no matter how good our intentions. That's why many people either don't bother, or don't practice recycling as thoroughly as they preach it.

My first encounter with recycling had more to do with people than with things. Early in my military experience, I learned that people can be recycled. The context was Army training. Any trainee who failed to meet course standards could be recycled, meaning removed from the class and set aside until the next cycle of training began. Recycled soldiers would be placed in a special holding unit until the new training date. That might be a week, a month, or much longer. The whole time, they would be doing odd jobs and kept busy at various military activities so that they could be useful at something until their designated purpose could be fulfilled. Any orders they might have for a new duty station, or for advanced training, would be cancelled until they had proceeded far enough with their recycled class to demonstrate they would complete it and be qualified for the next assignment.

Not all training failures resulted in recycles, though. Sometimes a soldier just wasn't cut out for the training, so there would be an effort to reclassify him or her into a more suitable field. Sometimes a trainee might experience a severe injury or illness, and sometimes he or she might simply decide that the training was not something they wanted to do. In those cases, the soldiers might end up out of the Army, having either suffered a condition that made them no longer fit for service, or having indicated by their own choice that they were not fit. In such cases, no amount of recycling would bring a better result, and the Army would lose a soldier, the most valuable asset in the force.

It is, after all, the value of the soldiers that cause these elaborate efforts to keep them in the service. As skilled individuals, and as part of a trained and cohesive team, it is soldiers who breathe life into the Army, determine its direction and character, and by whom its effectiveness is ultimately measured. That's why the Army I knew went out of its way to recycle, rehabilitate, retrain, and retain good soldiers, and went further out of its way to transform mediocre or bad soldiers into something greater than even they supposed they might be. It's only as a last resort that any soldier is removed from the

ranks before he or she has given the last full measure of what they have been called into the service to contribute.

Our Creator has similar reasons for continuing to strive with those called into His Kingdom, even when they would rather run the other way. Individually and collectively, we tend to underperform in our Creator's training program, leaving Him the choice of recycling us, or disqualifying us. Of course, disqualification is the last resort, seeing that He has already gone to unimaginable effort to redeem a people for Himself. We hear about that as Messiah Yeshua intervenes in an argument His disciples had about who would be greatest in His Kingdom. He makes a promise to the Twelve, and then he talks to Simon Peter about the recycling they are all about to experience:

You are the ones who have remained with Me in My times of testing. And just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, so I grant to you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you shall sit upon thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Simon, Simon! Indeed, satan has demanded to sift you all like wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith will not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.

Luke 22:28-31 TLV

We know about how Peter denied Messiah at Yeshua's arrest, how Yeshua welcomed him back into fellowship after His resurrection, and what a rock Peter was to the first generation of disciples. What we miss is that Peter was simply reenacting the pattern established at Sinai.

Israel's God had already redeemed the Hebrews and the foreigners who joined them when He brought them out of Egypt. At Sinai, He revealed His power to meet their needs for food and water, and to protect them from their enemies. Then He revealed His standards of conduct for a holy people, teaching them to worship Him in the ways they cared for each other. They were supposed to practice what He had taught while Moses received further details on how to prepare the place where God would dwell in their midst, and the special class of people who would minister to Him and to them simultaneously. But then, just as Moses received the final bit of instruction, the people he had left in charge took counsel of their fears, ambitions, and lusts, and made for themselves a god they could control.

That's when an entire nation committed themselves to recycled training, and when some individuals in the nation committed themselves to removal from the ranks. They had an advocate that day: Moses pleaded with God to spare the nation for His own Name's sake, just as God had intended all along. That's one way Moses showed us what Messiah would do, and continues to do for us all. Still, neither Moses nor Messiah Yeshua could shield God's people from the consequences of their actions. That's why 3,000 died that day at Sinai, and why harsh lessons like the sudden deaths of Ananias and Sapphira shock us into wondering whether God really is love, and what exactly love means.

He is love, even if He has to be tough love more often than He or we would like. That's why He didn't vaporize Israel after that Golden Calf incident, nor the disciples after they ran away at Gethsemane, nor all of us when we give lip service to His commandments while we do as we please. The consequences are always meted out on the Body, not just

the individual. That's why the Hebrew nation took 40 years to travel to the Promised Land, and why Messiah's Kingdom so far has taken 20 centuries to be revealed in its fullness.

Every setback brings opportunity to relearn and take a few steps further on the road, but it costs us, just as it cost Moses. The first time he went up the mountain, God Himself carved out the tablets of stone and wrote His Torah on them. The second time, God told Moses to cut two tablets to replace the broken ones. That's when the Hebrews got a glimpse of the partnership between Heaven and Earth, God and Man, even before they saw Moses' face glowing with the glory of the Creator. When Moses trudged back up Sinai with the new tablets he had prepared, he demonstrated that he had already learned a lesson about being the hands and feet of the Almighty, and leaving Him to do what only He could do. That's when Moses was ready to hear the Almighty describe Himself in thirteen distinct attributes:\*

Then *ADONAI* passed before him, and proclaimed, "*ADONAI, ADONAI*, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness and truth, showing mercy to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means leaving the guilty unpunished, but bringing the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, to the third and fourth generation."

Exodus 34:6-7 TLV

That's when God began the new cycle of training for Moses and His people. It's impossible to tell what cycle we are now in, but it is certain that one day we as a people and as individuals will complete our training. There won't be any need for recycling in a Kingdom where everything and everyone is made new.

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\* Ronald L. Eisenberg, "The 13 Attributes of Mercy: Asking God for forgiveness," My Jewish Learning, accessed March 10, 2023, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-13-attributes-of-mercy/>.