



**Parshat Emor**  
**Ezekiel 44:15-31**  
**May 9, 2015 / 20 Iyyar 5775**

This morning's haftarah is a fascinating one. Ezekiel, supposedly as a result of a vision, replaces the existing status of the priesthood, which was composed of a series of priestly families, by denigrating most of their behaviors and exalting, no, most likely decreeing, the superiority of the Zadokite family.

From this point onward, only members of the Zadokite family theoretically could serve in the Sanctuary and fulfill all priestly functions while the other priestly clans were relegated to minor positions, like gate keepers or assisting the people when they offered sacrifice.

One needs to remember that Ezekiel was one of the priests who was part of the first exile (597 B.C.E), thirteen years before the Temple was destroyed. He re-envisioned how priests would function in the newly constructed Temple, one which wouldn't begin to function for approximately eighty years. One might think that the way Ezekiel divided the Priestly class resulted in the division of Cohanim and Levi'im (the Cohan and the Levite clans), but that wasn't the case.

The priestly division most likely began to occur nearly one hundred and fifty years earlier, when Priests from the Northern tribes most likely immigrated south to Jerusalem in hopes of avoiding the Assyrian conquest. Both Northern and Southern priests shared similar cultures and religious traditions. Hezekiah, who was then King of Jerusalem, most likely integrated them (with some restrictions) into the priestly culture, thus creating a priestly class composed of those who could offer sacrifice and from whom the High Priest would be chosen, and a second group of priests who performed minor functions.

This process was most likely re-enforced one hundred years later, when Josiah allegedly transformed the government by replacing local tribal elders with a priestly bureaucracy in order to further his agenda and strengthen the country. The prophet Jeremiah, a member of a priestly family from the North, was most likely one of his strong adherents and used his influence to convince the Northern tribes to acquiesce to Josiah's plan. This also could have been the origin of different priestly status.

What message could this morning's haftarah be delivering? The Zadokite house was most likely supplanted by the Hasmoneans several hundred years later. One could say that the prophecy was time limited or that the Zadokite became corrupt and fell out of favor.

One could also look at this text as reminder that sometimes one has to re-envision the old and to make it new. One of my old friends, Steve Silverstein in Los Angeles, has been known to say that Judaism takes the old and makes it new and then takes the new and makes it better.

Perhaps, the lesson to be learned is that sometimes our existing notions of what is appropriate might need to be reimagined. For example, twenty years ago the leadership of the Jewish community understood intermarriage to be a plague. Everyone thought that intermarried couples would dilute Jewish life. Everyone believed that these men and women would cease to act and identify with Judaism. But fifty years of data has proven this to be incorrect. The truth is how we relate to and understand intermarriage might be the only way to preserve our future and the ideals within it that we hold so dear.

Perhaps Ezekiel's message applies to us in many areas. Areas that only have to be found.

*This week's Unraveller was written by Rabbi Charles Simon, Executive Director of the FJMC and author of numerous books, including "Understanding the Haftarah. An Everyperson's Guide" and "The Non-Jewish Spouse: Strategies for Clergy and Lay Leadership".*