

A SIGN TO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL*

אָמַר אֶל־אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן־אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן וְיָרַם אֶת־הַמִּחֹתֹת מִבֵּין הַשְּׂרָפָה

וְאֶת־הָאֵשׁ זָרְהֵהֶן לָאֵהָ כִּי קֹדְשׁוֹ:

אֵת מִחֹתֹת הַחֹטָאִים הָאֵלֶּה בְּנִפְשֹׁתָם

וַעֲשׂוּ אֹתָם רִקְעֵי פָחִים צְפוּי לַמִּזְבֵּחַ

כִּי־הֵקְרִיבֵם לִפְנֵי־יְיָ וַיִּקְדָּשׁוּ

וַיְהִיו לְאוֹת לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Say to Elazar, son of Aaron the priest, take up the fire-pans from among the burning—and the fire scatter far—for they are holy.

The fire-pans of these sinners against their own souls,
they shall make them hammered plates as a covering for the altar,
for they offered them before Adonai and they are holy;
they shall be for a sign to the children of Israel.

Say to Elazar, son of Aaron the priest, to take up the fire-pans from among the burning—and the fire scatter far—Pour out the ashes other than in the special place outside the camp, because the offering was of an “alien incense,” and although brought at the behest of Moses, it was “defective” (Sforno). For they are holy—It is forbidden, under the circumstances (the direct taking of life by God?), for anyone to “derive benefit” from these fire-pans (Rashi). The fire-pans of these sinners against their own souls—They were brought before God by those who wanted “to bring about a decision . . . over the true and real priesthood” that God desired, which was achieved at the cost of their lives (S.R. Hirsch), because they “opposed the Holy One” (Rashi). They shall make them hammered plates as a covering for the altar, for they offered them before Adonai—Because the effect of this offering was none the less to sanctify the Sanctuary, the fire-pans were “to remain dedicated to the maintenance of what had been achieved” (S.R. Hirsch). And they are holy—“At first they were but accessories of the altar, but now they are part of the altar itself” (Menachot 99a). They shall be for a sign to the children of Israel—Those who seek holy office for their own ends, God seeks to consume, because they pervert that which was created to raise up Am Yisrael in the divine image.

* Numbers 17:2-3 (in Korach)