

Potomac Torah Study Center
Vol. 7 #25, April 16, 2020; Shemini 5780

NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning almost 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his recent untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah.

Dedicated this Shabbas in Memory of our family Yahrtzeits this week: Yetta Franks (25 Nisan); Nathalie Morrison (26 Nisan); Leonard Franks (Yom HaShoa, 27 Nisan); and Anne Fisher (28 Nisan).

With Pesach ending around 8:30 p.m. on Thursday night, facing the task of putting away the Pesach kitchen and bringing back Chametz, there is little time to focus on a Devar Torah for Shemini. In this Parsha, during the dedication of the Mishkan, when God returns his presence to the center of B'Nai Yisrael, Aharon's sons Nadav and Avihu try to join their father in approaching the presence of God. A fire comes from heaven and immediately consumes their bodies. In our Parsha, Aharon had to cope with the sudden passing of his two sons. During the past several weeks, more than 33,000 people in our country are known to have died of complications from coronavirus. (The statistics miss an unknown number of additional deaths, because many other people who have died did not have tests to confirm that their deaths came from this disease.) Many of our people have lost loved ones suddenly to this virus.

Our family has seven yahrtzeits (of relatives I have known personally) during Nisan. Four of them died during the week after Pesach – my Aunt Yetta (my mother's older sister), Hannah's mother, my cousin Leonard (who died on Yom HaShoah), and my mother. During the week when Jews remember the relatives we lost during the Shoah, my family has yahrtzeits on four consecutive days. As we count the Omer, marking the period from the start of our freedom from Egypt until the day when we received the Torah, the period that should have been a time of triumph and joy has seen oppression and death for countless centuries.

Numbers have a special meaning in Judaism, as the ancient song, "Who knows one?" reminds us at the end of our Pesach Seders. Six represents the days of work, and seven represents the perfection of people and the resting of Shabbat, both for God and for us. Eight is one beyond seven. Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis notes that nine represents our Creator. It is a divine number. Every multiple of nine has the property that the sum of its digits always equals nine or a multiple of nine. Eight is a bridge between seven and nine – therefore eight represents a bridge between us and our Creator. (This bridge is why a baby boy's bris is on the eighth day.) During the period of Sefira, as we count seven times seven, we reach toward the anniversary of our receiving the Torah. Shavuot is the culmination of the freedom that we started with our Exodus on the night of the first Seder. Although the season reminds us of oppression and death, a glorious future is coming.

With the shuls closed, I miss Hazan Henrique Ozur Bass leading Lecha Dodi with his special Sefira tune, a reminder of Eicha, so appropriate to this period. On Yiskor days, Yom Tov, Shabbat, and Yahrtzeit days, our inability to go to shul is especially painful. The joy of visiting with my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, in his home, office, and shul brought me personally and my family such joy for several decades. I also miss my daily davening at Beth Sholom. Hopefully social distancing will be lifted in time for us to resume the Late Maariv that has been a special part of each winter for the last 15 or so years.

As Mordechai told Esther, God will always save the Jews. Our task is to determine whether we are to be part of God's plan to save our people – or whether God will turn to someone else to be among those working with God. While we must

live through dark times for now, better times will come for our people. May we all be around to enjoy those days – and may they come soon.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Moshe David ben Hannah, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Tova bat Narges, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Beyla bat Sara, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, Ruth bat Sarah, and Tova bat Narges, all of whom greatly need our prayers.

Note: Beth Sholom has additional names of coronavirus victims on a Tehillim list.

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Shemini: Consolation Reprise
by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1998

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

Tragedies happen. Unfortunately, we can't control them, and we have to learn to live with their consequences, as we try to continue our lives. Tragedy does not discriminate. It touches the lives of the wealthy and the poor, the wicked and the righteous. The Torah does not avoid telling us about the greatest of tragedies that happened to the most righteous of men. This week it describes the tragedy that occurred to one our greatest leaders, Ahron the Kohen Gadol (High Priest). His two children, Nadav and Avihu, were tragically consumed by fire while bringing an undesignated offering to Hashem. Moshe is faced with the most difficult of challenges, consoling his bereaved brother who just lost two of his beloved children. The challenge is great and the words of consolation that Moshe used should serve as a precedent for all consolation for generations.

Moshe consoles Ahron by telling him, "This is what Hashem has previously said: By those who are close to me I shall be sanctified and thus I will be honored by the entire congregation" (Leviticus 10:3). Powerful words. Deep and mystical. We are in this world by G-d's command, and our mission is to maintain and promote His glory. Those are words that may not console simple folk, but they were enough for Ahron who after hearing the words went from weeping to silence. But Moshe did not just quote the Torah, he prefaced his remarks: "This is what Hashem has previously said." Only after that premise does he continue with the words of consolation. Why was it necessary to preface those powerful words by saying that they were once stated? After all, the entire Torah was once stated. Could Moshe not just as easily have stated, "My dear brother Ahron. Hashem is glorified by judgment of his dear ones."

It seems that the familiarity of the statements was part and parcel of its consoling theme. Why?

The sudden death of Reb Yosef could not have come at a more untimely time – a few days before Passover. A Holocaust survivor, he had rebuilt his life in Canada and left this world a successful businessman, with a wonderful wife, children, and grandchildren. It was difficult, however, for them all to leave their families for the first days of Passover to accompany his body, and thus his widow traveled with her son to bury her husband in Israel. After the funeral the two mourners sat in their apartment in the Shaarei Chesed section of Jerusalem. Passover was fast approaching, and they were planning to spend the Seder at the home of relatives. As they were about to end the brief Shiva period and leave their apartment, a soft knock interrupted their thoughts. At the door to her apartment stood none other than one of Israel's most revered Torah sages, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach.

"I live nearby," he said, "and I heard that there was a funeral today. I came to offer my condolences."

The sage then heard a brief history of Reb Yosef's difficult, yet remarkably triumphant life.

Then Reb Shlomo Zalman turned to the widow and asked a very strange question. "Did you say the blessing Boruch Dayan HaEmes? Blessed are You, Hashem, the true Judge." (This blessing acknowledges the acceptance of Hashem as the Master Planner of all events acknowledging that all that happens is for the best.) "Why? Yes," answered the elderly lady. "I said it right as the funeral ended. But it is very difficult to understand and accept."

Reb Shlomo Zalman, a man who lived through dire poverty and illness, four wars, and the murder of a relative by Arab terrorists, nodded. "I understand your questions. That blessing is very difficult to understand and to accept. You must, however, say it again and again. As difficult as it may be, believe me, if you repeat it enough you will understand it."

Moshe understood that as difficult as it may be, the words he used to console Ahron were the precise ones that encompassed the essence of the meaning of life and death. They would be understood by Ahron. But he had to preface it by saying that this not a new form of condolence. It has been said before. It was already taught. Now it must be repeated.

Difficult questions have no simple answers, but it is the faith of generations that must be constantly repeated and repeated. There are no new condolences; there are no fast answers. The only answers we can give are those that have been said for generations. Perhaps that is why we console our loved ones today with the same consolation that has been said for centuries. "May you be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem." And it shall be repeated – again and again — until there is no more mourning.

Good Shabbos

A Thought on the Parsha (Shemini): One Step at a Time

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2012

When we read Parashat Shemini, we are in the middle of the counting of the Omer – a process of seven weeks of seven days – until we finally arrive at Shavuot. This counting marks the time – in Rabbinic thought – from the Exodus to the revelation of God and the receiving of Torah at Har Sinai. Likewise, we find that a process of seven days was needed from the time that the Mishkan was built until God's glory could descend and inhabit the Mishkan. Only after seven days of inauguration, with sacrifices and rituals repeated each day, do we come – in this week's parasha – to the eighth day, yom ha'shimini, the day that the Mishkan became the place of God's dwelling on this Earth.

In thinking about counting and process, it is interesting to contrast the yomim tovim of Pesach and Shavuot, which are linked by counting, to that of Sukkot, which has no counting, no process. This difference of counting is not just a question of what occurs between the yomim tovim, but also within the yom tov itself. We say a full Hallel on all the days of Sukkot, but not on the latter days of Pesach. The Gemara in Arakhin explains that the reason for this is that the sacrifices are all the same on each day of Pesach, but they are different on each day of Sukkot. What is the significance of this? What the Gemara seems to be saying is that on Sukkot each day is distinct, each day is its own chag. The Hallel that we said yesterday does not relate to today; today demands its own Hallel. Pesach, on the other hand, is not a period of seven distinct days, but rather a single, weeklong chag. As such, the Hallel that we said on the first day is the Hallel for the week. Once Hallel has been said for the week, there is no need to say a full Hallel for each day.

Why should Pesach and Sukkot be different in this respect? Because one represents a process, the other does not. Pesach is about a historical event, or rather, a historical process, one that begins with the Exodus from Egypt and culminates (at least at its first stage) with the Splitting of the Sea on the seventh day. Sukkot, on the other hand, is to remember that we dwelt in huts when we travelled through the desert and that God protected us each and every day. This is not a process, but a separate miracle that occurred each day, that was renewed each day. When we celebrate Sukkot, we acknowledge God's protection of us, God's presence in our lives, each and every day. Each day is distinct; each day demands its own Hallel.

Now this comparison seems to favor Sukkot. Every day is special! Every day is unique! And, indeed, the days of Sukkot, even following yom tov, are much more exciting than the latter days of Pesach. On Sukkot something seems to be happening every day – we sit in a sukkah, we take the lulav and esrog, each night there is a simchat beit ha'soeivah going on somewhere, we do a hoshana procession each day, and we even have a special day of Hoshana Rabbah at the end. And as for the last days of yom tov we have Shmini Atzeret with tfillat geshem, and then the big excitement of Simchat Torah that ends the chag. As to the latter days of Pesach – what do we have? Not much. After the seder, the rest of the chag seems anti-climactic. Even the last day of Pesach doesn't have a name, doesn't have its own identity, its own special rituals. It is just shvi'i shel Pesach, the seventh day of Pesach, the end of a process.

But while Sukkot is more exciting, while Sukkot has something happening each and every day, Pesach is actually going somewhere. Pesach gets us to the Splitting of the Sea, Pesach gets us to the Receiving of the Torah at Har Sinai. To achieve these goals, we can't be jumping up and down and turning in a whirlwind. We have to actually be moving forward. One step follows the next, one day builds on the next. Seven days to get to the Sea, seven weeks of seven days to get the Torah.

Some people are always seeking excitement in their lives. They are looking for an experience that will stimulate their senses, that will be full of energy, that will give them a high. Such people can live very exciting lives, no doubt. But are they going anywhere with their lives? When one is seeking maximum excitement for each day, it can be hard to move forward. Moving forward requires planning, it requires laying a foundation, it requires planning how to build in a way that will last. It requires the often boring work of laying each brick on top of the previous one, so that, brick by brick, the building will finally be built and the goal will finally be reached. It can be hard to have the patience to see such a process to completion. We want a high now! But that does not get us anywhere that is lasting and enduring.

This perhaps was the sin of Nadav and Avihu. Having experienced a vision of God at Har Sinai, they were seeking to recapture that experience, to re-achieve that spiritual high. Instead, what did they see as their future? More of the same. Before the Mishkan was inaugurated, it was seven days of bringing the same sacrifice, doing the same ritual over and over again. And after the inauguration, it would be the same communal sacrifices, day after day. Put aside the fact that the seven days led to the eighth day, to the yom ha'shimini, where God's glory appeared. They had no use for this long, drawn out process to get to where they were going. They have to have a way to get there now, to get there whenever they want, with or without preparation. It was a religious high for the moment, but it was doomed to failure.

One often hears the complaint, "I get nothing out of davening," or "shul doesn't do it for me." If we think we can walk into shul or step up to davening with no preparation and have a meaningful religious experience, we are sadly mistaken. If we look for the shul to "do it for me" then it won't. If, on the other hand, we come to shul after a serious internal process, after working with persistence on our davening, on our connecting to God, if we put in our own "seven days of mi'luim," then we will be able to achieve our own yom ha'shimini, to connect meaningfully, to find God's presence.

People who are seriously engaged in spiritual growth speak of a spiritual discipline. It is a serious process of gradual, incremental, but substantive growth. It stands in stark contrast to the mass-market spirituality that pervades our society. Only with discipline, with process, can true growth be achieved.

There is no question that it can be hard to sustain one's investment during this process. Although there may be no big highs along the way, we will persevere if we stop to acknowledge the small steps, the small gains that we are making along the way. *Mitzvah li'mimni yomei, u'mitzvah li'mimni shavuei*, says the Gemara in Menachot (61a). On our path from Pesach to Shavuot, it is a mitzvah to count the days, and it is a mitzvah to count the weeks. It is a mitzvah to mark the day-to-day achievements, the small steps and advances, and it is a mitzvah to mark each week, the major milestones along the way.

The seven days from the building of the Mishkan until it was inaugurated, the seven weeks from the Exodus until we arrived at Har Sinai, were not necessarily filled with excitement each and every day. But they were leading somewhere. It is through such commitments, such processes, through small but substantive gains that build one day until the next, that we too can achieve true growth and reach our own personal Har Sinai.

Shabbat Shalom!

Shemini -- Role Play

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine ©2016 Teach 613

Role play is an effective way to appreciate a situation from a someone else's vantage point. Also, it enables a person to consider the proper behavior if role play they were to find themselves in a different situation. By assigning a proposed "Role" to a person they get to "try it on" and see how it feels and how they would react. In this week's portion we find out that it is even more important to try on one's own role for size.

The Torah describes how Nadav and Avihu, two talented sons of Ahron, wanted to really make their mark. With a high level of dedication they decided to bring Kitores/Incense in the Mishkan/Sanctuary. The Torah records that they were struck dead for doing so, and even tells us why: Because it was a fire that "G-d did not command." In other words, their yearning for greater heights of service took them to very lofty levels. But these were levels that they were not assigned. Unfortunately this was not an ordinary mistake. They "were playing with fire". Entering the Sanctuary without permission is serious business. It came with serious consequences.

This event with Nadav and Avihu is similar to the story that will later occur with Korach. Korach, too, had great aspirations to achieve more greatness than he was assigned. He wanted to be Kohein Gadol- The High Priest. But he was not assigned to that position; Ahron was. But Korach really wanted... and he pushed his desire into a rebellion with tragic consequences.

In our time there is much talk of people who feel that they got the "raw end of the deal." They feel "discriminated against" because of their role. Sometimes a sense of discrimination is the result of one's feeling a personal potential that is greater than they are achieving. This is the story of Rabbi Akiva who described himself as resentful of others, until through hard work he became great himself. But sometimes the sense of resentfulness is because we are too busy trying to role play other people's lives and have not discovered how to role play our own.

The Bostoner Rebbe once illustrated this phenomenon by observing that in his shul they discriminate against him in a most profound way. Although other Rabbis are typically called up for Shlishi (the third Aliya), he is never called up then. "Such Discrimination!" he declared with a loving smile. He explained: I am a Levi. In the time of the Beis Hamikdash my tribe was the one chosen to be the honor guard and to provide the music. People of my tribe have the distinction of being called up for the second Aliya, not the third. Yet if you would like to interpret it as discrimination, "They discriminate against me. They are not giving me Shlishi as befits a Rebbe."

A comfortable way to understand life is that it is like an army. Each person is given an assignment to further a common goal. If a person is assigned a certain goal, they cannot abdicate their position without giving proper notice and receiving authorization. Being in the air force is very grand and is a great contribution, but if one is on (boring) guard duty, he cannot just drop his assignment to achieve the loftier role of air force pilot. Such reassignment can be requested; only sometimes is it granted. The key to life satisfaction is not usually in reassignment. The key to life satisfaction is in understanding what the common goal is, and what our personal role is in achieving that goal.

On one occasion someone asked me if I am resentful that I am not a Kohein. It is, perhaps, an interesting thing to think about. But if I was a Kohein-as special as that is- I would not be allowed to go to a cemetery and would not be allowed in the same building as a dead body. This would preclude me from assisting a bereaved family on a most personal level. Far better to live the role assigned, than to imagine all the roles that we think we ought to have been given.

More often than not it is in fact hard to know how to define the "loftier role". Is it the men who dominate the service in shul or is it the women who typically dominate in nurturing and training the next generation of Jews, a precious commodity indeed. Is it the honest businessman who makes time to study Torah and do chesed with his family and with others, or is it the Torah scholar dedicated to high level Torah study and to empower people to be all they can be?

Far better than role playing other people's roles would be to search deep inside ourselves through Torah and through prayer, to discover our personal strengths and our own personal role so that we can be the astoundingly best that we can be.

With best wishes for a wonderful and safe Shabbos!

Rav Kook Torah **Shemini: The Error of Nadav and Avihu**

In the midst of the great public joy during the Tabernacle dedication, tragedy struck the family of the Kohen Gadol:

"Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, each took his fire pan, placed fire on it and then incense. They offered before God a strange fire that God had not instructed them. Fire came forth from before God and consumed them, and they died before God." (Lev. 10:1-2)

Why did Nadav and Avihu die? What was their sin?

Chochmah and Binah

The Kabbalists explained that Nadav and Avihu erred by separating the spiritual realm of binah (insight) from the higher realm of chochmah (wisdom). To understand this statement, we must first clarify the concepts of chochmah and binah.

Chochmah is the very essence of holiness. It is pure awareness, a flash of intuitive understanding. This lofty perception contains the splendor of sublime ideals at their highest level, before they are applied to the detailed characteristics of reality. Compared to the infinite expanse of chochmah, all else is small and inconsequential.

Below chochmah lies the spiritual realm of binah. Binah is an elaboration and extension of chochmah. This realm is created when the light of chochmah is ready to realize the ideals that govern finite content, enabling the formation of worlds and souls. Binah reflects reality in its most idealized form. It corresponds to the sublime purpose of creation and the culmination of life.

Exquisite beauty and delight are revealed in the realm of binah. Enlightenment through prophecy emanates from this realm. The absolute holiness of chochmah, on the other hand, transcends all forms of spiritual pleasure.

Israel draws its inner spirit from the transcendent realm of chochmah. As the Zohar states, "Oraita me-chochmah nafkat" — the Torah emanates from chochmah. The source of Israel's faith is beyond all spiritual delight, beyond all ideals. Ideals belong to the realm of binah. Ultimately, they restrict our aspirations and are unable to provide an absolute and constant level of morality.

Separating Binah from Chochmah

Nadav and Avihu drew their inspiration from the wellsprings of binah. They sought the sublime experiences that characterize this realm, a spiritual grandeur that is accessible in our world. Due to their heightened awareness of their own greatness, however, they mistakenly saw in the holy realm of binah the ultimate source of reality. They placed all of their aspirations in this spiritual realm.

By doing so, they abandoned the higher source of light that transcends all spiritual freedom and joy. The true basis of life is rooted in the supernal realm of chochmah and Torah. Unpunished, their mistake would have brought about the collapse of the world's moral

foundations. History is testimony to movements dedicated to great ideals that, because they were not anchored to the elevated source of chochmah, descended into the darkest depths of ignorance and cruelty.¹

Nadav and Avihu erred by pursuing the spiritual joys of prophecy and inspiration in a form detached from Torah and its practical teachings. This is what the Kabbalists meant by saying that Nadav and Avihu divided binah from chochmah. They tried to attain closeness to the Holy on their own initiative, offering a fire “that God had not instructed them.” The various explanations for their behavior suggested by the Sages — that they were inebriated, that their heads were uncovered (a sign that they lacked proper awe of Heaven), that they taught Torah in front of their teacher - all reflect the same basic flaw. Nadav and Avihu concentrated their efforts on their own spiritual attainments, without integrating the discipline of Torah. They were highly aware of their own spiritual greatness, but personal holiness must be negated before the higher light of Torah.

Repairing the Mistake of Nadav and Avihu

The Torah stresses that Nadav and Avihu had no children. Their service of God was not one that could be transmitted to future generations. And yet their independent spirit and idealism have an important place in the future Messianic Era:

“Remember the Torah of Moses My servant, which I enjoined him on Horev, laws and statutes for all of Israel. Behold, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before God’s great and terrible day. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.” (Malachi 3:22-24)

Malachi envisioned a future reconciliation between fathers and children. His prophecy also mentions Elijah the prophet and the Torah of Moses. What is the connection between these different themes?

The pre-Messianic Era is a time characterized by a tragic rift between the younger generation, idealistic and independent in spirit, and the older generation, faithful to the old traditions and the Torah of Moses. This divide parallels the sin of Nadav and Avihu, who separated binah from chochmah, dividing the ideals from their eternal source.

But the unique personality of Elijah, combining the prophetic ideals of justice with zeal for God’s covenant and Torah, will repair this rift. It is Elijah’s synthesis of Torah and idealism that will reconcile the generations. And together, the passionate spirit of youth (binah), together with the orderly and practical wisdom of the elders (chochmah), will bring about the final redemption.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Orot HaKodesh, vol. II, pp. 283-286; vol. III, pp. 360-361.)

1 How many millions have perished in wars over religious beliefs, as well as political ideologies such as communism and fascism?

The Paradox of Eight

By Menachem Feldman* © 2020

In Judaism, every number carries a specific energy and meaning. This week’s parshah, Shemini, “eight” (referring to the eighth day following the seven days of the inauguration of the Tabernacle), is a chance to think about the spiritual symbolism of the numbers seven and eight.

The number seven appears throughout the Torah quite often: there are seven days of creation, with the seventh day being the day of rest; the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar, Tishrei, is the month of the festivals; and there are seven-year cycles, culminating in the Sabbatical year of Shemittah. The Kabbalists explain that since the natural world was created in seven days through the seven Divine emotional attributes, the number seven represents the natural order.¹

The number eight, however, is the power of holiness that is greater than nature. When we encounter the number eight in the Torah, the Torah is alerting us that the topic we are discussing is one that transcends the natural expectation. It is the power of infinity.

Upon fulfillment of G d’s commandment “And they shall make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell in their midst,”² there was a seven-day inaugural celebration. During each of the seven days, the Mishkan (Tabernacle) was erected and sacrifices were offered. Yet, throughout the seven days of inauguration, there was no sign of the Divine Presence. For it is beyond the natural ability of a human being to draw down a Divine revelation into this world of spiritual concealment.

Only on the eighth day, the day representing the infinity of G d, did the Divine Presence reveal itself in the Mishkan. As the Torah describes:

And it was on the eighth day . . . and the glory of the L rd appeared to all the people . . . And fire went forth from before the L rd and consumed the burnt offering and the fats upon the altar, and all the people saw, sang praises, and fell upon their faces.³

The number eight seems to contain two conflicting elements. On the one hand, the number eight is in a class of its own, separate from the cycle of nature. Yet on the other hand, the number eight is a direct continuation of the number seven. This seeming paradox, explain the mystics, captures the mystery of the number eight. While the supernatural Divine energy cannot be drawn down by the human being and can only be gifted to us by G d Himself, G d chooses to reveal the energy of the number eight only after people invest themselves in achieving the number seven. Thus, only after the people celebrated the seven days of inauguration, representing the culmination of human achievement, did G d reveal the eighth dimension—that which transcends nature and could be expressed by the will of G d alone.

There are times when we are called upon to accomplish feats that we may think are beyond our natural capacity, whether in our personal life, our professional life, in our role as spouse, child, parent, friend or community member. The goal may seem elusive, far beyond anything we can imagine ourselves accomplishing. We are sometimes called upon to perform what is no less than a miracle: to bring spirituality, inspiration, goodness and kindness to a spiritually desolate environment. We tell ourselves that we don't possess the ability to create transformation. We tell ourselves that only a miracle can help. We tell ourselves that the job is not for us.

The answer to our despondency lies within the number eight.

Indeed, to break free of our natural limitation is beyond our ability, for the infinity of the number eight is gifted from above. Yet, eight follows seven. When we do all that is within our capacity, when we commit to the full "seven days of inauguration," then we are assured that on "the eighth day," G d will bless our efforts with His infinite ability.⁴

FOOTNOTES:

1. See Kli Yakar, beginning of Parshat Shemini.
2. Exodus 25:8.
3. Leviticus 9:1-24.
4. Adapted from the teachings of the Rebbe, Likkutei Sichot, Shemini, vol. 3.

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Shemini: Avoiding Being Duped

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnfsky*

[G d instructed Moses to teach the Jewish people how] to distinguish between the defiled and the undefiled. Leviticus 11:47

Spiritually, this decree refers to making the moral distinction between what is acceptable, healthy behavior and what is not. This distinction is easy enough when matters are clear and obvious. But all too often, the distinction is blurred, and what is in fact defiled can easily be taken as being undefiled.

By studying the Torah, we remain connected to G d, who is not subject to the limited reach of human intellect. Thus attuned to Divine consciousness, we instinctively know what is spiritually healthy and what is not.¹

FOOTNOTE

1. Likutei Sichot, vol. 7, pp. 72–73.

Excerpt from Kehot's Daily Wisdom, Vol. I

* An insight from the Rebbe.

With heartfelt wishes for good health and safety for one and all--Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman

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Shmini (Leviticus 9-11)

The Sins at the Beginning by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

During the dedication of the Mishkan, the Jewish people were required to bring many korbanos, sacrifices ¾ a goat for a sin offering, a calf and lamb for a burnt offering and a bull and a ram for peace offerings.

Why so many? The Torah of Kohanim explains that the Jewish people had an account with Hashem, with “sins at the beginning and sins at the end.” The “sins at the beginning” refer to the sale of Yosef, when the brothers dipped his coat in goat’s blood. The goat comes as atonement for that sin. The “sins at the end” refer to the Golden Calf, for which the calf is brought as atonement.

We can readily understand why the Jewish people had to make amends for the sin of the Golden Calf during the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan. The erection of the Golden Calf as an intermediary to Hashem was tantamount to avodah zarah, a direct affront to Him. Therefore, when the Mishkan was being dedicated and the Shechinah was about to dwell within it, amends were very much in order.

But what was the connection between the sale of Yosef and the dedication of the Mishkan? It was not a recent occurrence. Why then should it be brought up again in this context?

The Yalkut Yehudah points out that an underlying element of jealousy led to the sale of Yosef. The brothers could not bear that Yaakov singled Yosef out for a special role, that he gave him special treatment, that he provided him with special garments. If Yosef was so special, that meant they were less special. Unable to bear the thought, they plotted against him and eventually sold him into slavery.

What was happening when the Mishkan was being built? One family was being singled out to be the priestly caste, to perform the sacred service, to wear special priestly garb, to be given the priestly gifts, to be treated as special in every way. The Kohanim were an easy target for jealousy, as

indeed came to pass during Korach’s rebellion, when they declared (Bamidbar 16:3), “The entire congregation is holy and God is among them; why should you lord it over the assembly of God?”

The dedication of the Mishkan was, therefore, a time to remember that in Judaism there are roles. There are roles for Kohanim; there are roles for Levites; there are roles for men; there are roles for women. Not everyone is alike. Not everyone has the same strengths. Not everyone is going to have the same duties and responsibilities. Not everyone is going to get the same benefits and privileges. Everyone must be content with the role Hashem has assigned to him.

This then was an exceedingly appropriate time to bring sacrifices to atone for the sin of selling Yosef. This would impress upon the people the extreme danger of giving in to jealousy. It had led to disaster in the past, and it could lead to disaster in the future, unless it was nipped in the bud.

Special Qualifications After Moshe gave Aharon all the detailed instructions regarding his duties in the dedication of the Mishkan, he said to him, “Draw near to the Altar.” What happened? Why did he need special encouragement? Why did Moshe have to coax him forward?

The Torah of Kohanim explains that Aharon suddenly saw the Altar in the shape of an ox, and he shrank back. As the Ramban explains, the shape of the ox reminded Aharon of the sin of the Golden Calf, in which he had played an unwilling role.

In his great righteousness, Aharon did not consider himself worthy of approaching the Altar. “How can I come near to the Altar?” he said. “I, too, participated in the Sin of the Golden Calf.”

“My brother, you’re afraid of that?” Moshe told him. “You of all people don’t have to fear what the ox represents.”

That is why, the Torah of Kohanim concludes, Moshe said to Aharon, “Draw near to the Altar.”

The Torah of Kohanim leaves us somewhat in the dark. Why indeed did Aharon have nothing to fear from the image of the ox? What was wrong with his reasoning? Even if he was not fully guilty, it was certainly a matter of concern. What did Moshe mean when he told him that “you of all people don’t have to fear” the memory of the Golden Calf?

The Yalkut Yehudah offers an explanation based on the Midrash. Why indeed did Aharon participate in the construction of the Golden Calf? Even after he saw Chur murdered, why didn’t he put his foot down and take a stand? Why didn’t he say, “I will not allow this. Over my dead body will you make an idol”?

According to the Midrash, Aharon had the best interests of the Jewish people in mind. “If I let them build the Calf,” Aharon reasoned, “the sin will be forever on their heads. Better that I should build it. Better that I should be blamed than the Jewish people. Better that I should bear the sin.”

Hashem told Aharon, “Your love for the Jewish people was such that you were willing to sacrifice your righteousness to save them. Therefore, you will be anointed High Priest.”

Because of his self-sacrifice, because he was willing to give up his Olam Haba for the Jewish people, because he placed the welfare of the people above his own, precisely for these reasons was he deemed worthy of being the Kohain Gadol.

“My brother, you are afraid of that?” Moshe told Aharon. “That’s precisely why you were chosen. Draw near to the Altar!”

Perfect Faith ?? And Aharon was silent. (10:3)

Aharon’s two older sons, Nadav and Avihu, were men of extraordinary stature, righteous leaders who were worthy of someday stepping in the shoes of Moshe and Aharon. And then, during the joyous dedication of the Mishkan, they made a small error, and a fire reached out from the Holy of Holies and snuffed out their lives.

We cannot even begin to imagine the shock to Aharon, a father who witnessed his two glorious sons perish right before his eyes. What went through his mind in that split second? His own loss, the loss suffered by the entire Jewish people, the loss suffered by the two deceased sons themselves. So much loss. Such a gaping void.

What was Aharon's reaction? The Torah tells us that "Aharon was silent." Silence. Complete acceptance. Unshakable faith. One of the most eloquent and powerful exhibitions of faith recorded in the Torah.

The Torah forbids excessive mourning over a deceased relative (Devarim 14:1). "Do not mutilate yourselves, and do not tear out your hair between your eyes over the dead." The Ramban writes that self-destructive mourning shows a lack of faith in Hashem. If we believe in the immortality of the soul and that all Hashem does is ultimately for the good, we do not mourn too much, even in the face of tragic youthful death.

A few years ago, the Baltimore community suffered a tragic loss on Erev Pesach. Mr. and Mrs. Israel Weinstein's son and his wife were killed in an automobile accident while coming from Lakewood to Baltimore for Pesach. I was not there to witness it personally, but I heard from others that Mr. Weinstein's faith and acceptance were incredible. It is hard to conceive how a man who has just been told that his two beloved children had been torn away from him can walk into the Pesach Seder and make the Shehechianu blessing, thanking Hashem for sustaining life and bringing us to this joyous occasion. It is hard to conceive how such a man can walk into shul the next day and say "Gut Yom Tov" to everyone without a trace of his grief on his face so as not to disturb the festival spirit. It is hard to conceive how such a man, sitting in shul, can reach out and affectionately pat the cheek of a little child that happens to walk by. It could only be accomplished by a man whose heart is full of a rare and unshakable faith.

During the Shiva, the father of the boy whose cheek Mr. Weinstein had patted asked him, "How, in the moment of your most profound grief, could you still bend down to a child and pat him on the cheek?"

"At that exact moment," Mr. Weinstein responded, "when your little boy walked past me, with everything I was feeling in my heart, I realized how special each and every one of our children is. Sometimes we take our children for granted. Times like these clear our vision."

A person can only have such strength if he has a clear vision of the eternal light that shines at the end of every dark tunnel, if he has a strong and abiding faith in the Master of the Universe. Such a person, like Aharon before him, can be silent.

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from: **Rabbi Yitzchak Zweig** <rabbizweig@shabbatshalom.org> date: Apr 14, 2020, 4:21 PM subject: **Surviving the COVID-19 Virus --- Shabbat Shalom Weekly BONUS EDITION!**

As promised I have composed some thoughts on understanding the COVID-19 phenomenon. By every reasonable measure, this disease is a force to be reckoned with – and the human race is scrambling to cope. The COVID-19 virus is an implacable enemy that has the entire world under siege and many are on the front lines of this war. It may be hard to see this right now, but these difficult times will surely pass and future generations will undoubtedly look back at 2020 and judge every element of our battle.

As you have previously read in these pages, those of us who believe in a creator and a purposeful world know that the universe is constantly speaking to us. Unfortunately, most of us hardly notice and blithely continue on in our mundane lives. However, the universe is now literally SHOUTING at us, so we are forced to confront the most basic issue – what is God trying to tell us and what are we to do about it?

First a caveat: We no longer live in the prophetic eras of our glorious past. God hasn't appointed a messenger whom He told to deliver a message to the world neatly tied in a bow. Yet, we know that God cares about us and

only wants us to have the most extraordinary lives. Of course, God doesn't merely punish to cause pain and suffering. Much like a parent looks after the well being of a toddler, part of caring for us is trying to get our attention and guiding us back to the proper path for a meaningful life.

So we are compelled to divine what message God is trying to deliver, knowing full well that we will never really know for sure why things happen to us – after all, we have a very limited perspective. But we must make very effort and try to do our best to understand – which is all that God ever asks of us.

I want to begin with a story from the Talmud (Gittin 56b) that involves the Roman general Titus. In 70 AD, Titus besieged and captured Jerusalem, murdered her inhabitants, and destroyed the Second Temple. For this "achievement," Titus was awarded the Arch of Titus to commemorate his victory. The Talmud gives a full account of his atrocities upon entering the Holy Temple and it is a worthwhile read, though beyond the scope of this column.

However, I will give you a small excerpt from the story, which I find remarkably relevant to our times. After ripping down the huge tapestry that separated the area of the temple known as "Holy" from the area known as the "Holy of Holies," Titus made a rucksack out of this incredible tapestry and loaded it with the precious gold vessels found in the temple (the Menorah et al.). He then loaded it together with all the spoils of war on a ship to sail across the Mediterranean back to Rome.

While sailing, God caused a huge storm in the Mediterranean that threatened to swamp Titus' ship. Titus quickly scrambled to the deck of the ship and yelled defiantly at God, "It seems to me that the God of the Jews only has power over the oceans; when Pharaoh and others came to attack He drowned them, and now he seeks to drown me. If their God is truly mighty let him come and attack me on dry land!"

A voice came out from heaven and declared, "You evil man, the son of an evil man (his father was Vespasian – another beauty). I have in my kingdom a puny creature known as a gnat. When you get to dry land let me see if you can defeat even the smallest creature in my army." Sure enough when Titus landed, a gnat entered his head through his nose and bored its way into his brain and caused him intense pain and suffering for many years. When he was about to die he instructed his officers to burn his body and scatter the ashes over the seven seas "so that the God of the Jews shouldn't come after me."

I have heard it said in the name of Rabbi Asher Weiss that we see God responded to the absolute chutzpah (hubris) of Titus – a totally delusional and self-centered individual living within the fantasy of his own perceived unlimited power – with the smallest creature in the animal kingdom. In other words, God showed him that not only did he not have power over the world, he couldn't even defend himself from the smallest of God's creatures.

I find this story remarkably relevant to what we are experiencing today and incredibly parallel to our own times. As a society we have become more self-involved, self-absorbed, and self-centered than perhaps any other time in world history. In short, we have become selfish. Need proof? Did you ever notice that the actual names of some of this generation's biggest technological innovations are all about "me"? Ever hear of the "I"phone, the "I"pad, or the "I"cloud? How about this generation's obsession with the "selfie"?

In our families, we have become more selfish than ever. How else could we account for such a dismal success rate for the typical marriage? We tend to forget that the real reason to get married is to share and become a giver and nurturer. This is how we build healthy families and children who are outwardly focused. But we infect our kids with the same disease; self-centeredness, an expectation of entitlements, and train them to give in to every self-indulgent thought that enters their head. The saddest part? We don't even try. Marriage, like televisions, computers, and everything else, is disposable. This isn't working for me? Time to reboot – throw it all out and try again.

That's just on the personal level. On a communal level, we are solely focused on what affects us and nary a care of how anyone else is impacted. There used to be a time in our history, not that long ago, when both the Republican and Democratic parties had the understanding that while they have different perspectives, both are working together for the greater good of their great nation. Compromise was a necessary component of politics. Today, politics is mostly about assigning blame and doing whatever is possible to block the interests of the other. The good of the nation is hardly even a consideration.

In the past, when politics got a little one sided or if there was a scandal brewing, the nation could rely on a mostly impartial arbiter of information – the national media outlets. Today that thought is totally laughable. The liberal media treats every republican with disdain and mockery and the conservative media fights tooth and nail to promote its agenda. Both sides conveniently ignore facts that run counter to their mission. They simply manufacture news to their slant. Perversely, each side touts themselves as seeking to protect the interests of the American people. Please. Even the media outlets are incredibly selfish.

Never has this self-centeredness been more evident than looking at how our world treats our planet. Do you think that global warming and sea rise is an insidious fantasy of the liberal leaning scientists? Perhaps you should come to Miami Beach where I can show you how much things have changed even in just the last several decades. I am sorry to say, but by most scientific measures our planet is ill and it is reaching the critical point of no return. Why? Because most of us treat this planet like a little kid throwing garbage out the window of a moving car; someone else will clean it up, someone else's problem.

What is God's response to this arrogant self-centered selfishness? "I am going to send you the tiniest creature in my kingdom and let's see how you do against it." Our world has quite literally shut down, we have been brought to our knees. By what? The tiniest of creatures. This COVID-19 virus is about 500 nanometers.

Let me put that in perspective for you. A bacteria (like the dreaded E.coli) is roughly one micron in size. A micron is 1/1000 of a millimeter. A nanometer is 1/1000 of a micron. This virus is about 40-60 nanometers. I think we can all agree that this virus, which is too small to even be seen under a typical microscope, is about as small as you can get.

The name of this organism is the coronavirus; thus named because the shape of it appears to have a crown on it head. Perhaps this is a hint as to who is really in charge and king over everything else?

What has this disease caused us to learn about ourselves? Well first and foremost that we are all interconnected. Some foolish person making a poor decision a half a world away can quite literally affect nearly every single person on the planet in some way. There should no longer be a self-centered perspective of "us vs. them" – we are all in this together.

When a war must be fought, it can only be done effectively as a united front; in war it becomes quickly evident that self-interests go out the window and soldiers get sacrificed in the interest of the "greater good." In our war, the victims are many and our self-sacrificing soldiers on the front lines of this war are the healthcare workers and first responders quite literally putting their lives (and that of their families) on the line. Sadly, many of these soldiers have died in the line of duty.

On the front lines, suddenly class distinctions become irrelevant. To a patient lying in an ICU, the last thing he cares about is what religion or ethnicity or political affiliation his doctor/nurse belong to. It's not simply unimportant in the grand scheme of things, it would be ungrateful to even consider those labels. This caregiver is doing everything in their power, at great personal peril, to save you. You learn to care about them as people as well.

In this war, our lives or that of our loved ones, may be saved by an Arab doctor or a Chareidi one, or for that matter an illegal immigrant performing some personal kindness. We need to learn and appreciate everyone who is on board to give to the greater good. I truly believe, that if called upon, the vast

majority of humankind is ready to serve in that capacity. Humanity begins by ignoring perceived divisions and work together.

Perhaps the lasting image, in my mind at least, is seeing everyone on the streets, in stores, and walking around outside in face masks. Covering our face, perhaps the one part of our body that defines our very individuality, is probably the greatest lesson of all. Not surprisingly, even our personal technology points to this. That very same phone that has been built to open and unlock on facial recognition, doesn't recognize us anymore. The lesson should be clear, we need to redefine who we are, focus less on ourselves and determine how we fit into society at large.

It's true, difficult times bring out both the best and worst in people. Those who don't get the message will continue to act selfishly. Some will continue to selfishly gather for a variety of reasons that they justify in the face of communal and governmental pressure. Others will price gouge on hoarded medical supplies or try to take advantage of the difficult situation that others find themselves in.

But I believe that the vast majority of humanity is good and well meaning and well intentioned. The fact that we rarely see headlines about the many thousands of people who follow the government's guidelines for not gathering in groups, or the unsung heroes who are out there doing whatever they can to help others every day, doesn't mean they don't exist. No, we aren't perfect, but hopefully most of us can learn to improve ourselves, show leadership, take responsibility, and focus on improving the world.

Pressure can either crush something or turn a piece of coal into a diamond. In these difficult and pressure filled times we must recommit to become something more than what we are, and be sure not to crumble into nothingness. We must stand up, take responsibility for ourselves, and show leadership and resolve.

Yes, some will spend this time of isolation binging every single movie or show available to them. But hopefully most people will be self-reflective and will begin to consider that for most of their lives they wished they had both the time and the opportunity to do exactly what they want when they want without interference. Now they have to figure out what to do with that opportunity that they have always pined for.

So where to begin? Obviously, there is no secret formula for coping with the difficulties of isolation. But we should begin by acknowledging that when things begin to spin out of control we must start focusing on taking control back wherever we can. These areas include our daily schedule, what we eat, our health, how we interact with our family, and working on our emotional well-being.

There is a well known story from a Chassidic master that goes something like, "When I was young I planned on changing the world. When that seemed unattainable I decided that I wanted to change my country. As I got a little older I decided that I would just focus on changing my city. After I got married I decided that I would be satisfied if I could just improve my family. After that failed, I decided to work on myself."

"Once I managed to improve myself, I was able to impact my family, my city, my country, and the world."

When we all take ownership that our responsibility to improve everyone else begins with improving ourselves, we will then be able to give others what they need and work together for a greater good. At that point we can start looking forward to the beginning of a unified society not divided by petty differences. We thus become a brotherhood of man, children of a single God. May we merit to see the day when the entire world recognizes and serves the one true God and embraces his mission for a unified world. As the prophet says (Zecharia 14:9), "On that day Hashem will be One and His Name will be One."

from: Esplanade Capital <jeisenstadt@esplanadecap.com> date: Apr 14, 2020, 4:24 PM subject:

Rabbi Yisroel Reisman

Topic - An idea regarding Kavod Chitzoni and Kavod Penimi

As we prepare for Shabbos Chag Pesach, a wonderful Shabbos, a very special Shabbos. Zman Cheirusainu. A Shabbos where the very first Seder Kos will be a Mitzvah D'oraissa of Kiddush in addition to the other Mitzvos D'oraissa that we have on the Seder night.

Let me share with you a few thoughts regarding the Yom Tov. I would like to start with something which at least at the outset seems to be technical but has a very deep Machshava. That is that we all know that on Chol Hamoed we do not take haircuts and the reason for that is, Shelo Yekaneis L'regel K'shehu Minuval. The purpose is to encourage people to take haircuts Erev Yom Tov or the day before Erev Yom Tov. But the idea is Shelo Yekaneis L'regel K'shehu Minuval that a person should go into the Yom Tov with a proper haircut.

In other words, Yiddishkeit says a person with a proper haircut that is the beauty of a person, that is the way a person should be. It is interesting that nevertheless when it comes to a Nazir we say as it says in Bamidbar 6:5 (שְׁוִיכָּל פְּרֻעַ, שָׁעַר רָאשָׁוֹ). We say that a sign of Kedusha is someone who is not into the growing of his hair. Someone who is Farkert, somebody who is (פְּרֻעַ). Somebody who doesn't grow his hair long and that seems to be a Siman or a sign of a level of Kedusha. It is a general question which needs an explanation. How is it that by Nazir not caring about the growing of the hair is a sign of Kedusha, not caring about Chitzonios and when it comes to Yom Tov we want people to go in with a proper haircut. The truth is that it is not only a Yom Tov Kasha as every Erev Shabbos it is a Mitzvah to take a haircut.

I saw in the Emes L'yaakov on Nach Cheilek Bais which is the first Cheilek that actually came out, that he talks about this Yesod and I would like to explain it by using Rav Yaakov's idea and then attaching it to an idea that I saw in the Ohr Gedalyahu and to be Metzareif two Rosh Yeshivos of Torah Vodaath, to one Machshava.

Let's start with Rav Yaakov. Rav Yaakov says that there are two different things, Kavod Chitzoni and Kavod Penimi. He says that certainly the Kavod Penimi of a person, the greatness of a person is a person who doesn't pay attention to things which are signs of Gaiva, things which are signs of haughtiness, a person being immaculately presentable among people. Avada, Kavod Penimi is that a person should care about spiritual things, not about things which are Megusham, things that are Kavod Gashmi.

Nevertheless, there is an idea of Kavod Chitzoni. Kavod Chitzoni is a Melech or a Kohen Gadol who is obligated to go around with a fresh haircut. The idea of taking a haircut L'kavod Shabbos and L'kavod Yom Tov. There is a Kavod Chitzoni. The idea of going into a Yom Tov or going into a Shabbos, is to show the world how you consider the days that are coming upon us to be very special days. That you go towards it with a proper Kavod Chitzoni. In the Penimios of course, a person should not pay too much attention to the Gashmiosdika ideas that are very much the Nekuda of many many people.

Rav Gedalya Schorr brings in the Ohr Gedalyahu somewhere in a footnote, B'sheim one of the Gedolei Chassidus, that Aderes V'emunah L'chai Olamim. The Pizmon, the poem of Aderes V'emunah L'chai Olamim, Habina V'hab'racha L'chai Olamim are pairs of things that are in essence, opposites. They are things that are not compatible. But L'chai Olamim, by HKB" H these things do become compatible.

Some of them are easy to understand. Hagaiva V'hagedula, to be truly great and giving and at the same time have Gaiva, doesn't make any sense. They are really things that are complete opposites and Mimeila it is something which only L'chai Olamim, HKB" H can put the two of them together and it is not a Stira.

Hahod V'hahadar L'chai Olamim. Hod and Hadar are opposites. Hadar is Kavod Chitzoni, it is something that is beautiful to the eye like for example Pri Eitz Hadar has to do with beauty. Hod on the other hand, has to do with Kavod Penimi.

It says that Moshe Rabbeinu had Karnei Hod. Rashi says in Parshas Ki Sisa calls the Ruchniyasdika rays that were coming from him as Karnei Hod. Where it says in the Posuk (וְיָתַר מִתְּהִלָּה, עַל־תְּהִלָּה). Put from your beauty on him.

It is talking about spiritual beauty. So Hod and Hadar are things that are not compatible. They are opposites. By the Borei Olam Hod and Hadar are L'chai Olamim.

So that we understand that Hod is a Hod Penimi and Hadar is a beauty that shows Chitzonios. For Yom Tov we have to show the Chitzonios as we prepare for Yom Tov. But for ourselves, we have to worry more about the Hod. So it interesting, we go from Erev Pesach where we have to take a haircut straight into the Yimai Hasefira. The Yimai Hasefira are days on which we are not allowed to take a haircut. We go from Hadar, Chitzoni to the Hod Penimi. On the Yimai Hasefira we want to champion the Middah of Hod that we should be able to have the inner Penimios which is great, which doesn't care about how a person looks on the outside. So we have these two competing values that are very important to us.

According to what we just said, the Chitzoniosdika Kavod and a Penimiosdika Kavod going into Yom Tov is Kavod Chitzoni and Aveilus and Sefira are times of Kavod Penimi it is very beautiful that the Issur of taking a haircut in Sefira which is a time to work on the Hod Penimi ends on Lag B'omer which in Middos is Hod Sheb'hod. It is a day of extreme value of Hod, reaching Hod Sheb'hod and after that you can take a haircut, because the Avoda of Hod lasts until 33 days in the Omer. This is a technical idea with a beautiful message.

<http://torahweb.org/torah/docs/rsch/RavSchachter-Corona-23-April-08-2020.pdf>
Piskei Halacha on Coronavirus Shaylas

Rav Hershel Schachter

23. Due to the highly contagious nature of coronavirus, there are certain governments that have mandated either immediate burial or cremation (this is not the case currently in the United States). Under those circumstances, every effort should be made to avoid cremation. Therefore if a Jew would pass away on Shabbos, the burial should be done immediately (on Shabbos) by non-Jews. In addition, the storage facilities of many funeral homes in New York (and elsewhere) are currently filled to capacity and have raised concerns regarding the upcoming Yom Tov. Under these tragic circumstances, we must allow that the burial be performed on Yom Tov. Relatives who wish to participate would not be permitted to walk beyond the techum, nor would they be allowed to accompany the hearse in a car.

On Yom Tov Sheini, it is theoretically possible for Jews to be involved in the actual burial, and in that case they would be permitted to join in the car and travel beyond the techum. This would only be relevant for those who would be physically involved in the burial (digging the grave, lowering the casket into the ground and filling in the grave with dirt). No one else including close family members would be allowed to travel to the cemetery.

Ordinarily, one who travels to a cemetery on Yom Tov Sheini for a burial, would be required to stay in a local Jewish home for the remainder of Yom Tov, but due to the current necessity of social distancing, this is impossible. Therefore, they may return to their homes on Yom Tov Sheini. However, due to the current danger, it is strongly recommended that all burials be done by professionals with the use of machines. Accordingly, the family members would unfortunately not be present at the burial on Yom Tov.

24. Often, a patient's chances for survival are significantly increased when someone is advocating on their behalf, especially if this advocate is himself a doctor or medical professional. In the current situation, family members are usually not allowed in the hospital, both due to overcrowding and to concerns about their own safety.

The halacha is that we violate the laws of Shabbos even if there is only a slight chance that it will save a life. If family members - especially medical workers - would call the doctors or nurses tending to their loved ones to check in and to discuss the situation, it may lead to greater care and concern for the patient, thus increasing the chances of survival. Therefore, the family should arrange that these communications be made, even on Shabbos and Yom Tov, in order to advocate for the patient in the hospital.

http://torahweb.org/torah/special/2020/rsch_sakana.html

Rabbi Hershel Schachter

The Correct Behavior When Dealing with Danger

[From several weeks ago]

Many have the mistaken impression that the Jewish religion places much emphasis on death and respect for the dead; after all, we recite kaddish, yizkor, observe shiva, and yahrzeit, etc. This is a gross misunderstanding. The respect that we show for the dead is a carryover from the respect that we show for the living. The Gemorah

(Kesubos 17a, see Shitah Mekubetzes) tells us that whenever there is a conflict between kovod ha'chayim and kovod ha'meisim, kovod ha'chaim takes precedence. When the chevra kadisha brings in the aron at a funeral, everyone stands up. People mistakenly think that we stand up out of respect for the niftar, but in many cases we never stood up for him when he was alive, so why should we stand up for him now that he passed away? The Bartenurah (Mishnayos Bikurim 3:3) explains that we are not standing up out of respect for the niftar but rather out of respect for the members of the chevra kaddisha who are presently involved in the fulfillment of a mitzvah. The respect for the living is based on the premise that all human beings were created b'tzelem Elokim. When the Torah requires us to demonstrate kovod ha'meis, it means that even after the person passed away and no longer has tzlelem Elokim, i.e. a neshama, we still have to act respectfully towards the body because it used to have a tzlelem Elokim.

Of the six hundred and thirteen mitzvos, one of the most important is the mitzvah of v'chai bohem v'lo sh'yomus bohem (Yoma 85b). Not only does the halacha require that if there is a sofek sakanah we must violate almost all of the mitzvos in the Torah to save a life, but we are also required to do so even if there is only a s'fek s'feika, a remote possibility (Yoma 85a). The Gemorah (ibid) adds that even if the likelihood is that by violating Shabbos or whatever other aveira we most probably will not be saving anyone's life, we still do not abstain from the action due to that likelihood (rove - majority).

When Bnei Yisroel were traveling in the midbar for 40 years, the weather conditions were such that there was a slight sakanah in performing bris milah. Most of the sh'votim did not fulfill the mitzvah except for sheivet Levi [1]. They had an Orthodox rabbi among them, i.e. Moshe Rabbeinu. Why didn't all the sh'votim ask him what to about this sofek sakanah? If it is a real sofek sakanah he should not have permitted sheivet Levi to perform the mitzvah despite their pietistic protests, and if the sofek sakanah was so insignificant that it simply should have been dismissed, why didn't he insist that all the sh'votim perform the mitzvah of milah?

The Gemorah (Yevamos 12b) tells us that the answer is to be found in Tehillim (116:6), "Shomer p'soyim Hashem." Whenever there is a slight sofek sakanah that is nowhere near fifty-fifty [2], the halacha declares that it depends on the attitude of the patient. If the patient whose life is at risk (or the parent of the patient who is responsible for his well-being) is personally not nervous about the danger, then the halacha does not consider it a sofek sakanah; we apply "Shomer p'soyim Hashem." But if the patient whose life is at risk is nervous and concerned about the sofek sakanah, then the halacha requires us to act based on, "V'chai bohem v'lo sh'yomus bohem", and the sofek sakanah takes precedence over almost all of the mitzvos of the Torah. Shevet Levi had bitachon, and therefore were not concerned, and therefore for their children it was not considered a sofek sakanah, but with respect to the other sh'votim who were concerned it was in fact a sofek sakanah, so every sh'vet was acting k'din.

However, if one individual is not concerned, but the nature of the sakanah is such that everyone is interdependent and the individual who personally is not nervous may possibly spread a disease to others who are concerned about its spread, then the concept of Shomer p'soyim Hashem does not apply. The individual who is not concerned does not have the right to determine for the others who are concerned that there is no sakanah for them.

The Rakanti [3] relates that one of Ba'alei Ha'tosfos was deathly sick before Yom Kippur and the doctors warned him that if he fasts he will certainly die but if he eats on Yom Kippur there is a slim chance that he may survive. He decided to fast, and of course he died. All of the Ba'alei Ha'tosfos were upset over his decision and felt that he went against the halacha.

If a terrorist threatens to kill me unless I violate one of the mitzvos of the Torah, the halacha usually is that pikuach nefesh takes precedence over most of the mitzvos in the Torah. What if an individual wants to put up a fight knowing that he may well lose his life but thinks that by being moser nefesh he will fulfill the mitzvah of kiddush Hashem? This matter was a famous dispute amongst the Rishonim. The Rambam's opinion is that one may not volunteer to give up his life al kiddush Hashem when not required by halacha because this is tantamount to suicide [4]. Many other Rishonim disagreed with the Rambam. However, if there is no terrorist pressuring me to violate my religion, but there is merely a dangerous situation of sickness then all of the Ba'alei Ha'tosfos agreed with the Rambam that it would not constitute a midas chassidus to ignore the sakanah [5].

In determining what is a sakanah and what is not, the practice of the Tanoim always was to follow the doctors of their generation. Every so often the Rambam would take a stand on a medical issue against what it says in the Gemorah and the Chasam Sofer (Teshuvos, Yoreh Deah #101) explains that the Rambam was a doctor and he did exactly as the Tanoim did, namely, to follow the doctors of his generation. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 331:9) also says explicitly that we follow the doctors of our generation even in contradiction to the medicine recommended in the Gemorah.

We should certainly do the same as the Rambam and the Shulchan Aruch and follow the doctors of our generation in determining what is considered a sakanah and what is not considered a sakanah.

Some well-meaning individuals have blown out of halachic proportion the significance of tefillah b'tzibur and talmud Torah b'rabitim and have opted to ignore the sofek sakanah presented by the corona virus when in conflict with these two most important mitzvos. We live in a generation where many b'nei Torah tend to exaggerate the significance of Torah and tefillah. Although their intention is certainly l'shaim Shomayim, we must all keep in mind that when paskening shailos, one may not rely on an exaggeration.

All exaggerations by definition are sheker - a misrepresentation of the truth of the Torah. Rav Chaim Volozhiner signs off quite a few of his teshuvos saying, "Keil Emes, Nosan lanu Toras Emes, u'bilti el ho'emes eineinu - the true God gave us the true Torah, and we only look for the truth." Any exaggeration in the area of Torah and halacha is clearly a misrepresentation of our religion. The commentaries on Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 157) refer to the comments of the Maharshal in his sefer Yam Shel Shlomo (Bava Kamma 38a) that to misrepresent a law of the Torah constitutes an aveira related to avodah zorah [6] and as such would be subject to the principle of aveireig v'al ya'avon.

With respect to a sofek sakanah the halacha clearly requires that we go extremely l'chumrah. Especially religious Jews, who know that they are charged with a mission in life, should certainly be extremely machmir on matters of sofek sakanah.

Although every word of a poem appears in the dictionary, the poet conveys an idea by putting the words in a certain order. So too, different people can have the same ideas and the same principles, but if you put them in a different arrangement you have changed the whole understanding of each one of the principles [7]. Once you exaggerate the significance of any particular mitzvah, you have misrepresented the whole picture of kol haTorah kula.

[1] See Rashi, Devarim 33:9. [2] See Achiezer, volume 1, #23,2. [3] Siman 166; see Teshuvos Dvar Yehoshua, vol. 2 #94 [4] Hilchos Yesodei haTorah, 5:1. [5] See Mishna Berura 328:6. [6] Because we believe that the Torah is a description of the essence of G-d, misrepresenting the Torah is tantamount to misrepresenting G-d Himself [7] Thoughts 1:22, by Blaise Pascal

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com> reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha SHEMINI Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The death of the two sons of Aaron remains one of the great mysteries in Torah narrative. The Midrash and the commentators offer various explanations as to the cause of this tragedy. The sons did not want to marry, they had somehow drunk wine and were inebriated, as well as other faults ascribed to them. And since the work of the priests was so holy and delicate, their deaths occurred. However, this is a difficult path to follow in order to explain - if human beings can ever explain - why bad things happen to good people.

Some of the commentators see this as retribution to Aaron himself for his role in allowing the Golden Calf to be created, and to have caused the Jewish people to be seen in such a hideous fashion immediately after receiving the Torah. The problem with this explanation is, naturally, that we learn that the sins of the father are not to be visited upon the children nor the sins of the children to be visited upon their parents. Because of these difficulties, no matter what type of explanation we wish to explore, it seems to me that the response of Aaron to this tragedy is really the only response that human beings can make. That response was silence.

Aaron does not say anything, and in that silence, there is an acceptance of the fact that the judgment of heaven is always inscrutable to humans. Despite our best efforts and the wisdom of our commentaries, many times in life, the question remains stronger than any potential answer that can be offered. And this itself draws the line between the Creator and the created, between heaven and earth.

We would naturally like to be able to understand everything. The basic hubris of human beings is that we can figure everything out for ourselves. You will notice that this is always a trait that exists within young children, who want to do everything on their own, and who think that they are capable. This human trait has a positive side to it because it allows us to be creative and inventive, to attempt new things, and to gain new insights into life.

However, it also has drawbacks. We eventually bump up against the wall of ideas that we do not understand, which, to our mind, is irrational and even unjustified. We are, therefore, left in confusion and disappointment. The only solution is silence and acceptance, and, so to speak, the ability to move on even if we do not understand the events themselves.

I think that this will be the type of response that is necessary when the current coronavirus pandemic finally departs. There will be many who will assign reasons and causes for its occurrence. However, whatever reasons and whatever ideas are assigned, will eventually be found wanting on the scale of human judgment and rational understanding. We will have to accept it for what it is and attempt to move on. Just as Aaron did, we will move forward and accept the judgment of heaven and renew ourselves in the service of God and of Israel. We must look forward to better times and to productive achievements. I hope that this will occur quickly, peacefully, and with goodness. In any event, let us pray for better times and the ability to be silent when noisy explanations do not really help. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Berel Wein

from: Daniel Keren <keren18@juno.com> via gmail.mcsv.net date: Apr 12, 2020, 8:06 PM subject: Shabbos Stories for the Corona Virus Pandemic of 5780

Rabbi Yechiel Spero

This time is unprecedented. It might feel like a sad time. It is a scary time, but it might feel like it's sad also. I would like to talk to you why we shouldn't be sad – why we should be upbeat and cheerful and happy. I would like to share with you [a story].

The following story ... took place a hundred years ago, but this story is really happening every single day. In the early 1900s there was a plague called typhus. Typhus could wipe out a whole town or village and people were dropping like flies. When the plague came to the town of Nikoliev, the Rav, Reb Meir Shlomo Yanofsky was a tzaddik and strengthened the people. One day, the Rav got sick and was quarantined. There was one Jew, Rav Asher Grossman, who went to visit the hospital. When he arrived, he was told that he was not permitted to enter the gates because of the contagious disease. So instead, he stood outside the hospital and he opened the Tanya. Without knowing if anyone was listening, he began to cry out, ain ra yoired milimala – no bad will come down from heaven (Igeres HaKodesh 11). He read it out loud twice with great emphasis. Rav Asher would do this every day and sometimes he would continue reading further about why it is important for a person to distance himself from sadness and that a person should not be sad.

After five weeks, Rav Meir Shlomo Yanofsky was released from the hospital. At a kiddush thanking Hashem for his health, he said, "There is one person that I want to thank. I was down and destitute. I was broken. I had nothing left until I heard that beautiful sound – ain ra yoired milimala. The Ribono Shel Olam never sends bad to us.

"Even if something looks like bad and feels bad, the Ribono Shel Olam in his infinite wisdom and kindness loves us more than anything in the world and He would never hurt us. He just wants us to come closer and this is how He is doing it. I wouldn't have heard those words, I would have fallen into depression and sadness and I don't know if I ever would have made it out."

He hugged and kissed Rav Asher Grossman and thanked him for saving his life. There are many points in davening that we can focus on. At the end of davening when we say, shomer Yisrael, shomer shearis Yisrael, think about that the One Being can protect us is Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Sometimes we have a tendency to run through tachnun, but now we have plenty of time.

Take your time and say the words with thought. There are three pesukim that we say, which Rav Perr suggested to be said with extra concentration.

When a person feels uneasy and tense he should say these pesukim and it will work like magic to calm him down. These are pesukim about bitachon. Baruch hagever asher yivtach b'Hashem v'haya Hashem mivtach. Bitchu b'Hashem adei ad ki v'kah Hashem tzur olamim. V'yivtechu vecha yodei shimecha ki lo ozavta dorshecha, Hashem.

The Ribono Shel Olam never leaves us. He never has and He never will. So chin up everybody. It's going to be a little bit of a challenge, but we're up to it. We have the strength and have the ability. I'm looking forward to seeing you all. We miss you. Be Happy.

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com from: Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald <ezbuchwald@njop.org> subject: Weekly Torah Message From **Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald**

rabibuchwald.njop.org Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message - Shemini 5780-2020 "The Responsibilities of Leadership" (Revised and updated from Parashat Shemini 5761-2001) Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald In the opening chapters of this week's parasha, parashat Shemini, Moses summons Aaron, Aaron's sons and the elders of Israel to participate in one of the most exalted ceremonies in Jewish history, the inauguration of the Tabernacle and the consecration of Aaron and his sons to serve as the priests of the People of Israel.

According to tradition, the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, had been built and completed on the twenty-fifth day of Kislev, coinciding with the future date of the celebration of Chanukah. Starting from the twenty-third of Adar, Moses, serving as the temporary High Priest, practiced each day, for seven days, erecting and taking down the Tabernacle. Moses also served as the interim High Priest during the sanctification of the new priests and the dedication of the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was finally erected permanently on the first day of the month of Nisan, at which time the Kohanim (priests) assumed their new roles.

The inauguration day was the day for which Aaron had longed, for his entire life. After enduring the travails of slavery in Egypt as well as the momentous revelation at Sinai, Aaron could finally feel proud of what he had accomplished. Leviticus 10:1 describes the initial ceremony:

וַיַּקְרֹב בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן נָכְרָב וְאַבְרָהָם אִישׁ מִקְהָתָה, וַיִּתְּנוּ בְּנֵי אָשֶׁר, וְשִׁים יְמִין עַל־לְבָנָה, הַשָּׁם אֲשֶׁר־אָשֶׁר לֹא־אָשֶׁר אָתָם,

And the sons of Aaron, Nadav and Abihu, each took his fire-pan, put fire on them and placed incense on it, and they brought before G-d an alien fire that He had not commanded them.

Scripture (Leviticus 10: 2-3) goes on to describe: And a fire came forth from before G-d and consumed them [Nadav and Abihu], and they died before G-d. Moses said to Aaron: "Of this did G-d speak saying: 'I will be sanctified through those who are nearest me, thus will I be honored before the entire people.'" And Aaron was silent.

On the greatest day of Aaron's life, tragedy strikes. Aaron's two oldest sons are dead and Aaron remains silent.

Many theories are proposed by our commentaries as to why Nadav and Abihu met this tragic fate. There are those who say that Nadav and Abihu were arrogant, and truly sinful, and deserving of death. Others say that they were so pure and holy, that they needed to be taken away from a world polluted with evil.

Some commentators suggest that the strange fire that Nadav and Abihu offered was intended to fulfill a personal urge they had for their own self-expression. After all, every person has a right to self-expression, but apparently not when serving as a Kohain. Those serving as Kohanim, dressed in the priestly garments, are limited by the rules of the Priesthood, and all their actions must be directed to serve purely on behalf of the People of Israel. Personal needs and desires for self-expression have no place here.

The tragic story of Nadav and Abihu teaches that despite the privileges and glory that come with leadership, responsibility is a basic part of leadership as well, and responsibility, perforce, results in limitations.

Over the past fifty years, America has seen a significant diminution of confidence in its leaders. Support for, and confidence in, both the presidency and the Congress has reached new lows. Many attribute the loss of respect and confidence to the leaders' own actions and behaviors. They have ceased to act as leaders, and have been increasingly acting as "regular guys." That sad reality has resulted in the demeaning and "defining down" of the Office of President and the role of Congress.

Many contemporary social philosophers see validity in separating the questionable personal lives and actions of public officials, from their public lives. Judaism does not see it that way. Those who serve in leadership roles have responsibilities. If they do not wish to abide by those responsibilities and high moral standards, let them not assume leadership roles.

There's wisdom in parashat Shemini. Wisdom not only for the ancients, but for all generations, past, present and future. Leadership requires responsibility. Leadership results in limitations. Face it, or flee from it!

May you be blessed.

from: Lehrhaus <editors@thelehrhaus.com>

date: Mar 31, 2020, 9:29 AM

subject: **Birkat Ha-Ilanot amidst Covid-19**

By Rabbi Shmuel Hain

1. Shelo Hiser Be-Olam Kelum

The world right now feels even more broken than usual. As the spouse of a healthcare worker on the front lines, I am terrified. As a community rabbi, I have already co-officiated at a funeral for a COVID-19 victim. The previously vibrant woman died alone and most of her family could not even attend the graveside service. Pop-up hospitals and temporary morgues in New York City and elsewhere are our unimaginable reality. At first glance, there is nothing more incongruous with this particular moment than the special blessing we recite during the month of Nisan—the Birkat Ha-Ilanot.

Once a year, beginning on Rosh Hodesh Nisan, upon first witnessing the budding of fruit trees, we affirm that God's world is perfect. The source for this Halakhah and for the text of this singular blessing is the Bavli in Berakhot (43b) which states:

One who goes out during the month of Nisan and sees (fruit) trees starting to blossom recites the blessing: "Barukh Atah Hashem Elokeinu Melekh Ha-Olam Shelo Hiser Be-Olam Kelum (alt. Davar) U'Varah Vo Beriyot Tovot Ve-Ilanot Tovot Le-hanot Bahem Benei Adam." Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has left nothing lacking in the world, and created in it goodly creatures and goodly trees to give mankind pleasure.[1]

Rabbi Norman Lamm noted[2] that the formulation of this blessing is bold, and highly problematic. One could even suggest that the blessing suffers from a fatal flaw. How can we in good conscience utter the words of this blessing – shelo hiser be-olamo kelum— and praise God for a world with “nothing wanting?” In a world filled with so much suffering, with disease, tragedy, natural disasters, and evil, this is not just false praise, it is absolute fiction! When so much of society is broken, especially at this time of crisis, how can we have the audacity to make the outrageous claim shelo hiser be-olamo kelum?

It indeed is a fiction, but, as Rabbi Lamm explained, “oh, what a glorious fiction it is!” The fiction is precisely the point. Once a year, at the first signs of spring and renewal, we look at the world through rose-tinted glasses. We are hopelessly optimistic. And we proudly project that optimism with the blessing on budding fruit trees- shelo hiser be-olamo kelum. During the month of Nisan, the time designated for past and future redemption, we momentarily overlook all of the imperfections of the world, maybe even ignore for a second all of the suffering during this horrific health crisis, and we unequivocally state- she-lo hiser be-olamo kelum— what a flawless world you, God, have created.

This blessing, with its rich and challenging theological message, may also reflect a profound insight about our emotional well-being. When I was a Psychology major in college, one of the more controversial theories emerging at the time was the theory of Depressive Realism. Depressive realism argues that mildly depressed individuals may actually make more realistic inferences than do non-depressed individuals about the world around them and about contingent events, like the possibility of a tragedy occurring or a pandemic. Previously, depressed individuals were thought to have a skewed negative cognitive bias that resulted in distorted beliefs about the world. Depressive realism counters that this negativity may reflect a more accurate assessment of the world. Additional studies have revealed that non-depressed individuals’ estimations are the ones that are actually biased- in an overly positive direction. It turns out our emotional health and well being may be aided by an overly optimistic perspective on the world; a positive cognitive bias promotes greater happiness, satisfaction, and an increased ability to cope with adversity. Shelo hiser be-olamo kelum, indeed.

This blessing, then, represents Judaism’s annual spring-time asseveration of a positive cognitive bias. Throughout our history, even and especially during times of peril, we have confidently proclaimed shelo hiser be-olamo kelum to inspire us to remain optimistic about the future of our people and of the entire world.

Indeed, the most profound experience I had reciting this blessing was on a trip to Poland 25 years ago this week. Enunciating this blessing on some fruit trees at the

entrance of Auschwitz, in the shadow of the Shoah, I felt the full power of proclaiming shelo hiser be-olamo kelum. I hope to once again have the opportunity to recite this blessing, full-throatedly, even this year during this global pandemic. I hope to see the possibility of a perfect world with nothing lacking, especially now when we are all reeling from COVID-19.

I hope.

2. Borei Nefashot Rabot Ve-Hesronan

There is another blessing of praise, one that is an everyday staple in Jewish liturgy, which seems to subvert Birkat Ha-Ilanot and its assertion of flawlessness. That blessing is Borei Nefashot, the baseline berakhah achronah we say all the time after snack foods. The text of this blessing praises God who is borei nefashot rabot v-hesronan- the Creator of a variety of souls and hesronan- their deficiencies, flaws, or lackings. Rather than declaring that creation is flawless, this blessing does the opposite. It thanks God for what we are lacking, affirming all of our imperfections. How can we, in Hodesh Nisan, proclaim that the world God created is flawless, while simultaneously thanking God for creating flawed souls?

There are a number of possible resolutions to this apparent contradiction,[3] but one meaningful explanation is to distinguish between the world God created and each individual nefesh- each being, each imperfect soul that God formed. Essentially, what we are acknowledging through borei nefashot is that God did not create people to be self-sufficient. Each one of us is incomplete and lacking. And that’s a blessed thing. Lo tov heyot ha-adam levado. We each need the love and support of another- a spouse, a parent, a child, or a close friend. We each need our community to help complete us- to make us better people, to inspire us, to learn from others and also to support us in times of need and celebrate with us in times of joy. We need our community to shape and inspire our Jewish values and commitments, and to educate and transmit our traditions in a sophisticated, relevant way to our children.

Borei Nefashot reminds us that no individual is complete on their own. It teaches us that we need help and we need to reach out to one another. We need to form partnerships and covenantal communities- as families, as shuls, as Jews, and as citizens of the world. We acknowledge and bless God for creating us in need, because it challenges us to seek out others for help and to seek out ways to help one another.

According to this perspective, the blessings do not contradict each other. The world God created, in toto, lacks nothing. Part of that completeness are the very deficiencies of each individual creature. Built into creation are the vulnerabilities of each being necessitating the other and community. If anything, these last few weeks have taught us how much we are social beings and how vital it is to live in community with others.

3. The Tragic Gap: Between Borei Nefashot and Birkat Ha-Ilanot

But there is an even more essential, even existential, dialectic presented by these two berakhot. Perhaps instead of resolving the tension between birkat ha-ilanot and borei nefashot, there is something particularly meaningful in holding on to these twin orientations, these dueling berakhot and their opposing formulations, simultaneously in our mind.

Holding both of these blessings at once demonstrates the capacity to stand and act in the space that Parker Palmer refers to as “the Tragic Gap.”[4] The Tragic Gap is the chasm between the reality of a given situation and an alternative reality we know to be possible because we have experienced it, albeit briefly. It is not called tragic because it is sad, but because (in the Greek myth and Shakespearian sense of the word) it is inevitable, inexorable. The form it takes changes over time, but there will always be a distance between what the world is and what it could and should be.

Palmer explains that to truly live with purpose in this world, we must learn how to function in the gap between what is and what could and should be. We must do whatever we can to narrow the Tragic Gap by improving our flawed existence. This work can be very difficult. Palmer notes that it is tempting to try to run away from the gap. If we cannot abide that tension, we resolve it by collapsing into one pole or the other. Some give in to the reality of the world as it is and adopt a posture of corrosive cynicism. If the world is so flawed, my only recourse is to make sure I look out for myself and get mine. Others slide into the pure possibility of irrelevant idealism. They ignore reality and do harm by promoting misplaced optimism.

But these two blessings, taken together, demand that we not give in to either impulse. We must resist equally both cynical and pollyannaish perspectives. Instead of sliding in one direction, these blessings invite us to fully inhabit the Tragic Gap. Birkat Ha-Ilanot allows us to experience, albeit briefly, a perfect world, even as Borei Nefashot affirms that living in a flawed world is an inescapable, and necessary, part of the human condition. These berakhot require us to hold the tension between reality and possibility in an active way, to take agency by standing in the gap and demonstrating with our own lives another way of creative living. Through these berakhot we broadcast our aspiration to bridge the gap, slowly working towards achieving a more perfect world.

During this Nisan, the Tragic Gap seems more like an untraversable gulf. In New York City, the latest epicenter of COVID-19, the numbers and images are horrifying

and can be overwhelming. The instinct to give in to the dark reality of the present moment is natural. Stories about people running into hospitals to steal precious personal protective gear show how during dark times there are some who look out only for themselves. The attraction of overly optimistic or beautiful timelines that wish away the public health crisis in the near future is alluring. Let us, instead, take our cue from the people who are actively living in the Tragic Gap, in every sense of the phrase. The heroic health care workers on the front lines of this crisis are doing all they can to narrow the tragic gap and to bring about a better reality. Following their lead, we should all be inspired to fully actualize a world she-lo hiser bo kelum, right now when it is ravaged by disease and isolation, and beyond.^[5]

[1] See https://www.halachipedia.com/index.php?title=Birchat_Ilanot for a review of a number of practical halachic issues regarding this blessing.

[2] I heard this from Rabbi Lamm in a very memorable address at my RIETS Hag Ha-Semikha in late March 2002.

[3] Tosafot in Berakhot (37a s.v. "Borei") for example, explain that the Hesronot of Borei Nefashot actually blesses God for creating necessities (like water and bread) which human beings require and would be incomplete without. This is in contrast to "Kol Ma She-Barah" which includes non-essential items. According to Tosafot, Borei Nefashot does not affirm our imperfections. It praises God for embedding in creation solutions for our needs. This is not the plain sense of the blessing and may reflect discomfort with praising God for creating deficiencies. For an overview of rabbinic literature on this blessing and how it may have evolved from two different blessings, see Yissachar Yaakovson, *Netiv Binah*: Vol. III, (1973), 99-103.

[4] See, for example, <http://www.couragerenewal.org/the-tragic-gap/>.

[5] **This reflection is dedicated to all of the health care workers on the frontlines of the COVID-19 crisis.**

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
from: Torah in Action /Shema Yisrael <parsha@torahinaction.com>
subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Shema Yisrael Torah Network
Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Shemini

פ"שׁתַּחַת שְׁמֵינִי תְּשׁׁׁפַּט
וַיְהִי בַּיּוֹם הַשְׁמִינִי קָרָא מֹשֶׁה לְאַהֲרֹן וּלְבָנָיו וּלְזָקֵנִים יִשְׂרָאֵל

It was on the eighth day, Moshe summoned Aharon and his sons, and the elders of Yisrael. (9:1)

The command to bring the offerings was for Aharon *HaKohen* alone. Why were the *Zekeinim*, Elders, included in the summons? *Rashi* explains that Moshe *Rabbeinu* wanted the Elders to hear for themselves that Hashem had elevated Aharon to the position of *Kohen Gadol*, High Priest. They should not suspect that Aharon had seized it for himself, or that Moshe had played favorites and given it to his older brother. Partiality, especially toward close relatives, has a way of raising people's ire. To assuage the situation and clear the air, Moshe stated that it was Hashem's command. It is certainly true that people love to talk, and Moshe rightfully ameliorated their concerns. Why, then, was it necessary for Moshe to repeat himself? In *Parshas Tzav* (8:5), Moshe says to the congregation, "This is the thing that Hashem commanded to be done." *Rashi* (to *Parshas Tzav*) explains that Moshe is actually saying, "You will see that everything that I do before you is upon the directive and command of Hashem and not for my honor or for the honor of my brother." Why does Moshe repeat himself (*Parshas Shemini*), in asserting that neither nepotism nor personal agenda was involved?

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, maintains that a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, who also guides a community or functions as a mentor to people, must – exclusive of his abstract knowledge and scholarship – also be versed in practical, applied hands – on *halachah*. In other words, knowing the *halachah*, but lacking the awareness and sensitivity of how and when to apply and present it in the most lucid manner, is not practical. While it certainly does not make one any less of a scholar, it does limit his accessibility to – and acceptance by – the very people he seeks to guide and reach. Imagine that an individual knows all of the laws of *kashrus* concerning an animal, but has never had the practical knowledge of seeing the animal and its anatomy. How can he possibly know how to recognize what is and is not kosher? Sensitivity in presenting the *halachah* to certain people is just as prudent as knowing the *halachah*.

Thus, the first time Moshe informed the nation that Aharon was Hashem's choice for the position of *Kohen Gadol*, he conveyed to them that Aharon possessed the erudition, personal sanctity and ethical/moral character crucial for the role of *Kohen Gadol*. This, however, is not all a *Kohen Gadol* requires if he is to navigate the labyrinth of personalities, emotions and ideologies of the nation successfully. As the *Kohen Gadol*, he is the spiritual vanguard, exemplar guiding spirit, and mentor of the nation. Erudition alone is not sufficient. He requires utilitarian common sensical knowledge as well. After observing Aharon during the seven-day Inauguration period,

Moshe told the people that Aharon was highly qualified to execute the functions of *Kehunah Gedolah*. This meant that not only was he spiritually fit and scholarly erudite, he was also a sensitive and pragmatic leader, capable of: communicating their spiritual obligations to the people; and dealing with each Jew's spiritual challenge. He would be the perfect leader for the nation.

אות החיים אשר תאכלו

These are the life forms that you may eat. (11:2)

Rashi explains that the word *chayah*, life, is related to the word *chaim*, life. Because *Klal Yisrael* are *davuk*, cleave, to Hashem, they are fit to be alive. He separated them from impurity and decreed commandments upon them in order to maintain their purity of soul, thus continuing their relationship with Hashem, which, consequently, grants them life. To put it simply: Our adherence to the laws of *kashrus* grants us "life" status. Our people have kept the laws of *kashrus* for thousands of years, ever since Hashem gave us the Torah. Hashem entered into a covenant with the Jewish People and gave them the Torah, which obligates each Jew to uphold and fulfill its commandments. The *kashrus* laws are part of that covenant. Kosher is covenantal food. *Kabbalah* teaches that non-kosher food impedes the soul's spiritual potential. Last, as *Rashi* teaches: "We are alive if we keep kosher, since it makes us suitable to maintain our relationship with Hashem." Thus, one who disregards the obligation to eat covenantal food severs his relationship with Hashem, the Source of life.

Bearing this in mind, when one attempts to reach out to our spiritually estranged brothers or sisters and finds that they simply do not "understand" what he/she is teaching, it could quite possibly be as a result of their "diet." Obviously, I do not mean cholesterol, fat, etc. but non-kosher food prevents the soul from achieving its potential. We Jews are different. Our *neshamah* is delicate, and, as a result, it does not tolerate *devarim temitim*, impure/contaminated things entering our system.

Two *yeshivah* students would study together daily in one of the premier *yeshivos* in Bnei Brak. Chaim Leib and Efraim/Efi, spent every afternoon deeply ensconced in the sea of Torah. Suddenly, out of nowhere, Efi began to have difficulty understanding the *svatos*, logic, of the subject matter. Originally a fine *landan*, analytic Torah scholar, he seemed to slack off in his ability to understand – let alone initiate novellae. As the weeks passed, it became increasingly obvious that Efi had a problem, when he could not even navigate the *Talmud*. Since he was otherwise in perfect physical and emotional health, his cognitive skill seemingly unimpaired in anything other than Torah, Chaim Leib suggested that they go together to seek out the opinion of a spiritual advisor. Being in Bnei Brak, who better to speak with than *Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita*?

Chaim Leib and *Efraim* visited *Rav Chaim*, and, after waiting in line for some time, they finally stood before the *gadol hador*, preeminent leader of the generation, and presented their dilemma. *Chaim Leib* asked the question, since *Efi* felt ill at ease asking *Rav Chaim* why he just could not understand a simple *svara*, logical statement. *Chaim Leib* described *Efi*'s total devotion to Torah, his diligence in study, and his G-d-fearing, ethical demeanor. What was the cause for his present spiritual remission?

Rav Chaim listened, took one look at *Efi*, and said, "Let your friend stop eating *bassar b'cholov*, meat and milk (which is a prohibited admixture), and he will feel fine." Understandably, both *Chaim Leib* and *Efi* were floored. *Efi* was a *frum*, observant young man. The thought of him consuming forbidden foods was preposterous. Nonetheless, *Rav Chaim* had spoken. He neither minced words, nor did he say anything that was not well thought-out and halachically supported. If *Rav Chaim* said that something was amiss, then something was amiss.

Efi denied any wrongdoing. *Chaim Leib* had difficulty believing him. After all, *Rav Chaim* had spoken. Back and forth went the accusations and denials, until finally *Efi* blurted out the truth: he had sinned, but it had not been his fault. He blamed *Chaim Leib*. "Me?" *Chaim Leib* screamed. "What did I do?" *Efi* now told his story (or, rather, his excuse), "One afternoon, I came to learn as usual, after having eaten a filling lunch in the *yeshivah*. That day the *yeshivah* had served chicken schnitzel, which was quite good. You offered me a coffee without asking me if I was *fleishig*. When I saw the coffee with the cheese danish that accompanied it, I just did not have the strength of character to override the temptation and say, 'Sorry, I am *fleishig*.' Afterwards, I felt terrible about my sin, but what could I do – it was over. The problem was that I never took into consideration *Chazal*'s statement that, once one sins, the *aveirah*, sinful act, soon becomes permissible in his eyes: *Nichnas b't'chum ha'heter*, he enters into the boundary of permissiveness. The trajectory of sin takes one down in a free fall, which causes the sin to lose its negative image. He no longer thinks that what he is doing is wrong. Everyone is to blame, but him. In his eyes, he is the victim, not the perpetrator.

Chaim Leib could not believe what he was hearing. His good friend, his *chavrusa*, study partner, with whom he had spent countless hours studying Torah, had fallen into the trap of sin. To make things worse – he blamed him for what had happened. *Efi* was, nonetheless, a *ben Torah* who had fallen. As such, one who

realizes that he has sinned can turn around and repent – which he did. With time, as Efi's *teshuva*, return, took hold, so did his learning. His cognitive ability returned, until the old Efi was back.

One thing bothered Chaim Leib, which he could not get out of his mind: How did *Rav Chaim* know that Efi was eating a prohibitive mixture of milk and meat? Chaim Leib returned to the home of the *gadol hador*, waited in line for a while, and, after reminding *Rav Chaim* of the incident, asked how he was so certain that Efi had sinned. *Rav Chaim* explained that one of the commentators to the *Shulchan Aruch* asserts that one who transgresses *Hilchos baasar b'cholov* will have the image of a goat on his forehead (as in, "Do not cook a goat in his mother's milk"). *Rav Chaim* said, "It was quite simple. I saw the image of a goat on his forehead. Thus, I knew that he had sinned. Eating prohibited foods stuffs the heart and impedes the mind." Efi became a victim of his own infraction.

אל תשׁקְעוּ אֶת נַפְשֵׁיכֶם בְּכָל הַשְׁרָץ וְלֹא תִּטְמְאֵו בָּהּ וְנַטְמֵהוּ בָּהּ

Do not make your souls abominable by means of any teeming thing; do not contaminate yourselves through them lest you become contaminated through them. (11:43)

Thorough the vehicle of a number of *mitzvos*, the Torah exhorts us to distance ourselves from prohibited foods. The prohibitions come in various forms: Some foods have once been kosher/appropriate for eating until they contracted a form of *tumah*, ritual contamination, rendering them spiritually unsuitable for Jewish consumption. *Neveilah* is a dead carcass, which has not been ritually slaughtered, rendering it unkoshер, so that it is *tamei*, unclean. *Sheratzim*, creeping creatures, in various sizes and physical build, may not be eaten. Bugs and insects, both land and water based, are restricted from Jewish consumption. They are all included under the rubric of *maacholos asuros*, prohibited foods. The Torah concludes these laws with the admonishment: *V'nitmeisem bam*, "Lest you become contaminated through them." *Rashi* quotes *Chazal* (*Yoma* 39a): "If you contaminate yourself by eating forbidden foods in this world, I will render you *tamei*, contaminated, in *Olam Habba*, the World to Come." Frightening. It is as if one who eats forbidden foods become what he eats. It transforms his spiritual makeup.

Consuming prohibited foods dulls one's spiritual potential. A Jew is initially holy, and his mission in life is to continue sanctifying himself, so that he is worthy of a "seat at the table," a place in the World-to-Come. Hashem is holy. He is our Creator and Heavenly Father. What father does not want his son to follow in his footsteps?

Sadly, despite all the opportunities available to sustain *kashrus* observance, it is still a challenge for many people who simply do not understand the significance of *kashrus* or why a Jew must sanctify himself and maintain himself on a level of *kedushah*, holiness. For a Jew, being good, moral, ethical is not sufficient. He must be *kadosh*, strive to be holy.

A teenager fell in with the wrong crowd. His friends convinced him that the life of a Torah Jew is archaic and out of touch with the world. Life is all about fun – the more fun, the more life. To live life in the fast lane without "speed limits" requires money, considerable amounts of money. Unless one is born into money, or has a very good source of income, lots of money (especially for a teenager) cannot be obtained legally. As a result, Shimon (the teenager's name) resorted to a life of crime. Thus, in addition to rebelling against Hashem, he turned his back and sinned against his fellow Jews. Stealing and drugs – both using and dealing-became a way of life.

The youth had not always been like this. Growing up in a *frum*, observant, home, where Torah study and *mitzvah* observance were paramount, he was, at first, no different than his siblings. It was when he fell under the influence of a boy in his class (a boy who was sorting out his own family issues), that Shimon began to descend to the spiritual nadir of depravity. It all came to a halt when a policeman caught up with him, arrested him, and availed him of a prison cell in exchange for his nice room at home.

Prior to standing before the judge for sentencing, he met with a prominent psychologist to discuss his fate. The psychologist felt that Shimon had always been a nice boy until he had fallen into a funk and sought the comradeship of others who did not have – or adhere to – his way of life. He ended up falling under their influence and here we are today; deciding how and where he will spend the next few years of his life. It was the judge's feeling that Shimon had two opportunities for rehabilitation: prison; or a working *kibbutz* where the discipline is strong and responsibilities are demanding. There is one major difference between the two: In prison, he would be permitted to eat kosher food. The downside is the clientele with whom he would be consorting 24/7: prisoners, offenders, felons and worse. The *kibbutz* would provide him with a far better selection of friends, but kosher food would not be available. Obviously, this was a non-observant *kibbutz* where *kashrus* observance was anathema. What would it be: *Kashrus* or total exposure to the dregs of society?

The parents asked *Horav Yitzchak Zilberman*, *Shlita*, for a *halachic* ruling in the matter. *Horav Yitzchak*, *Shlita*, deferred to his father-in-law, *Horav Yosef*

Shalom Eliyashiv, *zl*, who rendered his decision: return to prison. He explained that it is forbidden to feed non-kosher food even to a child. To place this boy in a non-*frum kibbutz* that does not ascribe to the laws of *kashrus* is similar to feeding him non-kosher food. While it is true that in prison he would be exposed to degenerates and other dregs of society where he may pick up more unsavory ways of living, it is something that he would do on his own. If he goes to the *Kibbutz*, we would be feeding him non-kosher food.

Second, living in the *kibbutz* with people who, for the most part, maintain ethical, cultured behavior, the boy might become like them and be led to believe that he is fine, that he is lacking nothing as a Jew. Under such circumstances, he would have little likelihood that he would ever do *teshuva*, repent, his past/present way of life. If he were to go to prison, however, he will realize that, at best, he will become a model prisoner – but a prisoner nonetheless. If he wants to achieve more and better, he would have to repent. Imagine, this boy had fallen so much that prison for him was the best chance of rehabilitation. How careful we must be concerning the friends with whom our children socialize. One unsavory friend can destroy a budding future. Children are not experienced in discerning good from bad; parents, however, should be. It is their responsibility to monitor their children's relationships. While they might offend someone now – they could be saving their child's future.

Va'anani Tefillah

ותפלות מורה באלה תתקבל בראוי

U'Sefillasam meheirah sekabeil b'ratzon. And their prayer speedily accept with favor.

In earlier times, when life was not filled with constant challenge, each and every prayer was Heavenly reviewed, and the "litmus" test of *kavanah*, intention, concentration/devotion, was affirmed for purity of mind and sincerity of heart. Once a prayer passed the test, it was sent up through the channels of prayer to the Heavenly Throne. Today, as we experience the birth pangs of *Moshiach*, with both moral and spiritual challenges abounding, every prayer receives immediate attention, as it is forthright sent to Hashem. *Achas Shoalti* explains this change with a parable originally employed by the *Chafetz Chaim*.

A wealthy landowner had a servant whom he called Moishka. Moishka was a devoted servant who would do anything for his master. Unfortunately, Moishka did not do well in those areas of service that required cognition, since he was not endowed with a surplus of acumen. One day the master asked him to fetch a glass of water. He returned with a glass of dark water, having left the sand and sediment from the bottom of the well in the glass. "Moishka," the master admonished, "from now on, when I ask for water, I want filtered water. Run all water through a filter – a few times." A few weeks later, a fire broke out on the master's land. The master called for water – which Moishka brought – eventually. By the time he arrived, the fire had already destroyed ten homes. When the master screamed at Moishka for taking his sweet time in bringing water, Moishka reminded him that he was occupied with his master's demands to provide filtered water. It takes time to filter water.

We all know what the master replied to this foolish excuse: "When a fire is raging, we do not need filtered water to extinguish the fire. Likewise, with prayer, during the period preceding *Moshiach's* arrival, we are undergoing so many challenges in life that proper concentration is in and of itself a major challenge. The fire is raging. Every prayer offered by a Jew receives immediate attention. The "filter" is not necessary.

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Parshas Shemini

True Service of God

Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu, each took his pan, put fire in them, and placed incense upon it, and they brought foreign fire before God, which He had not commanded them. (Vayikra10:1)

MOST OF US probably read this as if it has nothing to do with us. Nadav and Avihu made a grave mistake and lost their lives because of it, greatly dampening the entire experience of one of the greatest moments in history, the inauguration of the Mishkan. How could they have been so wrong at so important a moment?

Then Moshe Rabbeinu turned the entire thing on its head. While we're shaking our heads in disdain and disbelief, Moshe tells Aharon that his sons' acts and deaths revealed that Nadav and Avihu were actually greater than even the two of them! THEY died sanctifying GOD'S Name!

Huh?

And while we scratch our heads in utter confusion, we might happen to take a look at Sha'ar HaGilgulim to find out just how important Nadav and Avinu were. Their physical lives may have been short, but their spiritual lives were long and meaningful. They reincarnated into all kinds of important people in Tanach, giving them access to prophecy as a result.

Nevertheless, they HAD made a big mistake, and they HAD been executed by Heaven for it. Midrash and Kabbalah can greatly deepen our understanding of just about anything, especially this tragic episode in the Torah. And believe you me, both of them do.

But, as the Talmud states, at the end of the “journey,” we still have to come back to what the Torah says on the simplest of levels, and that is, that Nadav and Avihu offered a “foreign fire before God, which He had not commanded them.” And ironically, **COVID-19** has made this verse more relevant to us than it has been in a long time, if ever.

I have spent more time washing my hands in the last few weeks than I have in the last year. My mother always told me to wash my hands with soap for 20 seconds, which I faithfully did NOT do. It wasn't out a lack of respect for my mother, just a lack of belief in the need for such extreme cleanliness. Not one to say “I told you so,” I have done this to myself on her behalf.

The hardest part to get used to, is not davening in a minyan. Unquestionably my davening has been more heartfelt over the last few weeks than it usually is in shul. In shul I have to keep up, and the pace is usually faster than what I need, to be able to put myself completely, or at least mostly, into what I am saying. And davening with others is naturally somewhat distracting.

But still there are things I just can't do alone, like say or answer to Kaddish, Borchu, or Kedushah. They are “Devarim Sh'b'Kedushah,” which require a minyan to say. And sometimes we need a minyan to “carry” us, when our bodies just don't have the energy to put themselves into tefillah. At home the energy has to come from within ourselves each time.

And what about someone who is in aveilus or has a yahrzeit? Miss davening? Miss Kaddish day after day, davening after davening? That's SO hard to do. What will happen to the relative's soul if Kaddish isn't said for him or her on time?

Everyone skips minyan at some point or other. Sometimes it's because we're not feeling well, but even then it's a struggle. There are times people go to shul when halachically they really shouldn't, for their own health and especially for the health of others. And the opposite is also true—they stay home when they halachically probably could have gone and been part of a minyan.

The mikvah too. In some circles, men going to the mikvah is not only a go. Missing it one day is psychologically tantamount to a sin. Even though there are signs warning people not to use the mikvah, if they have something that could make others sick, many people dunk anyhow.

That's Jews for you—they LOVE their mitzvos. Everyone loves a wedding, but Jews have an additional element to consider—it's a MITZVAH to bring joy to the chasan and kallah. And if that means dancing until you are soaking wet with sweat and in very close proximity to others doing the same, well, all the more worthy is the self-sacrifice for the joy of others.

I can't remember the last time I missed a weekly parsha on Shabbos. Males have an obligation to hear every word of the Torah each year, read in a minyan from a kosher Sefer Torah. If you miss a weekly reading, ideally you're supposed to make it up. Sometimes people returning from chutz l'aretz need to have a special reading of a parsha they missed, because they came back to Eretz Yisroel when the weekly parsha in the Diaspora was a week behind.

Even on a Shabbos when I could barely walk for one reason or another, I still went to shul to hear the parsha. Not too long ago I had some foot trouble. Because of the pain it took 15 minutes to hobble down a hill I usually walk in two minutes. And when a voice inside said, “Turn around...go back home,” another voice said, “No way! We're not missing a parsha!”

The question is to what extent a person at a time of crisis needs to put his health—and clearly the health of others—at risk to fulfill a mitzvah in the IDEAL manner. Is it called mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice for God and Torah, when a person breaks the rules from the Health Ministry so he can get to minyan, make a bris with friends, or participate in a chasanah?

What about when the rabbis themselves tell you that you HAVE to listen to the Misrad HaBriut? If you don't listen to them, and the rabbis represent the opinion of God in this world, then who are you doing the mitzvah for?

It has to do with what is called a “frum yetzer hara.” That's a yetzer hara that knows it can't get a person to commit an outright sin—the person is too frum for that. So instead it finds a way to turn a mitzvah into a sin and a sin into a mitzvah. This way the person can believe that his action—which is really a sin—is a mitzvah.

The problem is in the gray areas. Am I really that sick or that contagious? Isn't there some positive purpose in speaking this lashon hara? What are the odds that I have the virus? Or that I will get it if I go to shul? If I don't report all my income, then I'll have more money for tzedakah, etc.

In the words of one famous rabbi (who spoke in Yiddish), “What does God say?” After all, it's HIS mitzvos we're supposed to be doing, not OUR version of them. It's God we have to please, not some inner definition of who we are or what we have to do. Many people think they know the answer to that question when in fact they do not, and they therefore act incorrectly.

Intuition can play an important role in decision-making. But it can't be confused with the sense of insecurity, that one often feels when having to work counterintuitively. That can happen every time someone becomes accustomed to doing mitzvos a particular way for a period of time, and is then told to adapt to a whole new way.

The Gemora says that a person's prayers are only really heard when he is part of a minyan (Brochos 6a). That would certainly make it difficult not to go to one, if you care about God hearing your prayers. This is especially so if you are someone who doesn't always put much intention into your prayers.

However, just a few lines later the Gemora says that if a person is prevented from doing a mitzvah for reasons beyond his control, from HEAVEN'S point of view, it is as if he actually did the mitzvah. As long as the person reasonably did his part in trying to do the mitzvah, nothing more is expected from him.

So if you ran to minyan and only eight other people showed up, that's not your problem. You went to a minyan that usually works, with no way of knowing that it wouldn't that time. You did your part, and that's all that matters to heaven. You may not be able to say or answer Devarim Sh'b'Kedushah, but from God's standpoint it will be as if you did.

You want to go to shul but the virus has you locked up at home? If it weren't for the pandemic, you'd be davening at the amud, or at least saying Kaddish for someone who has died? Not only will it count on behalf of the niftar as if you did, but he will receive the additional merit of your doing the right thing, the HALACHIC thing, despite your internal opposition.

That is true service of God. It is hard to understand why God would shut down the social part of Torah life, but He has. The virus is just the agent He used to do it. And not just the social part of Torah life, but all close interactive parts of Torah life, like yeshivah boys helping to clean for Pesach, or people going shopping for food.

But as hard as that is to accept for us, it is what He wants. If a piece of treif meat is accidentally and unrecognizably combined with two pieces of kosher meat, all of them can be eaten. Not because it makes sense, but because God says so. (We just don't do eat all three because the rabbis know that we'd still think we're eating a piece of treif meat with the Torah's permission.)

The bottom line, is that we have to make sure that when we do the mitzvos of God, they are really the mitzvos of God, not just our idea of them. When the “mitzvos” we do are not what GOD wants at the moment, no matter how much they were at other times, they end up being sins instead. As this week's parsha makes perfectly clear, that does not get Heavenly applause, just the opposite.

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Between Hope and Humanity

It should have been the great day of celebration. The Tabernacle, Israel's first collective house of worship, was complete. All preparations had been made. For seven days, Moses had performed the inauguration. Now, the eighth day, the first of Nissan, had arrived. The Priests, led by Aaron, were ready to begin their service.

It was then that tragedy occurred. Two of Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, brought "strange fire, which [God] had not commanded them." Fire "came forth from the Lord" and they died. There then follow two scenes between Moses and Aaron. The first:

Moses then said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord spoke of when He said, 'Among those who are near to Me I will show Myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honoured.'" Aaron remained silent. (Lev. 10:3)

Moses then commanded their bodies to be removed, and forbade Aaron and his remaining sons to engage in rituals of mourning. He gave them further instructions to prevent such tragedies from occurring in the future, and then proceeded to check whether the sacrifices of the day had been performed. He discovered that Aaron and his sons had burned the sin offering, instead of eating it as prescribed:

When Moses inquired about the goat of the sin offering and found that it had been burned up, he was angry with Eleazar and Itamar, Aaron's remaining sons, and asked, "Why didn't you eat the sin offering in the Sanctuary area? It is most holy; it was given to you to take away the guilt of the community by making atonement for them before the Lord. Since its blood was not taken into the Holy Place, you should have eaten the goat in the Sanctuary area, as I commanded."

Aaron replied to Moses, "Today they sacrificed their sin offering and their burnt offering before the Lord, but such things as this have happened to me. Would the Lord have been pleased if I had eaten the sin offering today?" When Moses heard this, he approved. (Lev. 10:16-20)

Without going into the details of these exchanges, their psychology is enthralling. Moses tries to comfort his brother, who has lost two of his sons. He tells him that God has said, "Among those who are near to Me, I will show Myself holy." According to Rashi, he said, "Now I see that they [Nadav and Avihu] were greater than you and me." The holier the person, the more God demands of them.

It is as if Moses said to Aaron: "My brother, do not give up now. We have come so far. We have climbed so high. I know your heart is broken. So is mine. Did we not think – you and I – that our troubles were behind us, that after all we suffered in Egypt, and at the Red Sea, and in the battle against Amalek, and in the sin of the Golden Calf, we were finally safe and free? And now this has happened. Aaron, don't give up, don't lose faith, don't despair. Your children died not because they were evil but because they were holy. Though their act was wrong, their intentions were good. They merely tried too hard." But despite Moses' words of consolation, "Aaron remained silent," lost in a grief too deep for words.

In the second exchange, Moses is concerned with something else – the community, whose sins should have been atoned for by the sin offering. It is as if he had said to Aaron: "My brother, I know you are in a state of grief. But you are not just a private person. You are also the High Priest. The people need you to perform your duties, whatever your inner feelings." Aaron replies: "Would the Lord have been pleased if I had eaten the sin offering today?" We can only guess at the precise import of these words. Perhaps they mean this: "I know that in general, a High Priest is forbidden to mourn as if he were an ordinary individual. That is the law, and I accept it. But had I acted on this inaugural day as if nothing had happened, as if my sons had not died, would this not seem to the people as if I were heartless, as if human life and death meant nothing, as if the service of God meant a renunciation of my humanity?" This time, Moses is silent. Aaron is right, and Moses knows it.

In this exchange between two brothers, a momentous courage is born: the courage of an Aaron who has the strength to grieve and not accept any easy consolation, and the courage of a Moses who has the strength to keep going in spite of grief. It is almost as if we are present at the birth of an emotional configuration that will characterise the Jewish people in centuries to come. Jews are a people who have had more than their share of suffering. Like Aaron, they did not lose their humanity. They did not allow their sense of grief to be dulled, deadened, desensitised. But neither did they lose their capacity to continue, to carry on, to hope. Like Moses, they never lost faith in God. But like Aaron, they never allowed that faith to anaesthetise their feelings, their human vulnerability.

That, it seems to me, is what happened to the Jewish people after the Holocaust. There were, and are, no words to silence the grief or end the tears. We may say – as Moses said to Aaron – that the victims were innocent, holy, that they died al kiddush Hashem, "in sanctification of God's name." Surely that is true. Yet nonetheless, "Aaron remained silent." When all the explanations and consolations have been given, grief remains, unassuaged. We would not be human were it otherwise. That, surely, is the message of the book of Job. Job's comforters were pious in their intentions, but God preferred Job's grief to their vindication of tragedy.

Yet, like Moses, the Jewish people found the strength to continue, to reaffirm hope in the face of despair, life in the presence of death. A mere three years after coming eye to eye with the Angel of Death, the Jewish people, by establishing the State of Israel, made the single most powerful affirmation in two thousand years that Am Yisrael Chai, the Jewish people lives.

Moses and Aaron were like the two hemispheres of the Jewish brain: human emotion on the one hand, faith in God, the covenant, and the future on the other. Without the second, we would have lost our hope. Without the first, we would have lost our humanity. It is not easy to keep that balance, that tension. Yet it is essential. Faith does not render us invulnerable to tragedy but it gives us the strength to mourn and then, despite everything, to carry on.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

And Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer, placed fire on it, and laid incense thereon, and offered strange fire which He had not commanded them. And there came forth fire from before God, and it devoured them, so that they died before God. (Leviticus 10:1-2)

The portion of Shemini begins with the great drama of the week-long consecration ceremony of the Sanctuary. The nation is exalted, the leadership is inspired – but suddenly joy is turned into tragedy when the two sons of Aaron the High Priest are consumed by a fire sent down by God. What caused such a hapless event? The biblical text seems to say that it was because "they offered a strange fire which [God] had not commanded." What possible sin could these two "princes" in Israel have committed to make them worthy of such punishment?

The expression "strange fire" is so ambiguous that the various commentaries offer a number of possibilities. Immediately after the deaths of Aaron's sons, the Torah issues a command forbidding Aaron and his sons to ever carry out their Sanctuary duties under the influence of any intoxicants. If a person cannot "... distinguish between the holy and the mundane, and between the unclean and the clean..." (Lev. 10:10) he doesn't belong in the Ohel Moed (Tent of Meeting). Thus it's not surprising that one midrash (Vayikra Raba 12:1) looks upon this injunction as a biblical hint that Nadav and Avihu were inebriated when they brought the incense offering, the intoxicant turning their incense offering into a "strange fire."

Another midrash explains that Nadav and Avihu so envied Aaron and Moses, that they couldn't wait for them to step down so that they could step up. This is the strange fire of jealousy which hadn't been commanded of them; they themselves initiated a sacrifice without asking permission of their elders, Moses and Aaron. They were too ambitious for their own good.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, my rebbe and mentor, has often taught that in order to grasp how the sages wanted us to understand a given Torah portion, we should always turn to the haftora (the portion from the Prophets) for that

week, which often serves as a commentary in and of itself.

Three separate events take place in the haftora of this portion, (chapters six and seven in ii Samuel): Thirty-thousand of the nation's chosen join with King David on his journey to restore the previously conquered Holy Ark to Jerusalem, turning the occasion into a celebratory procession accompanied with all kinds of musical instruments. The ark is transported in an oxcart that belongs to the brothers, Uzzah and Ahio; when the oxen stumble, Uzzah reaches out to take hold of the ark. Right then and there, God strikes Uzzah dead.

Three months pass before David again attempts to bring back the ark, and when he arrives triumphant in the city of Zion, he dances with all of his might, upsetting his wife who chastises him: "How did the king of Israel get his honor today, who uncovered himself today in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows who shamelessly uncovers himself" (ii Samuel 6:21). The third incident records that David decides he wants to build a permanent dwelling for the ark of God rather than allowing it to rest in a curtained enclosure. At first the prophet Nathan is encouraging, but later in the night a voice tells him that although David's throne will be established to last forever, he personally will not build the Temple; his son Solomon will. In the account of the same event recorded elsewhere, the blood that David caused to flow in the various wars he fought prevents him from building a Temple which must be dedicated to peace (I Chronicles 22:8).

All three incidents point to the same theme: the emotional instinct of the individual has to take a backseat to the emotional desire to come close, too close, to the holy; the holy must be revered from a distance.

Uzzah certainly did not intend disrespect when he took hold of the ark; nevertheless, touching the holiest object in existence without permission was forbidden. Since Michal is the daughter of King Saul, and knows first-hand that a king's honor is not his own but is rather the nation's, she cannot applaud David's leaping and dancing in wild abandon – even if it be in religious ecstasy. As such, the monarch of Israel must always behave honorably and respectfully, fully in control of his actions.

And as to who will build the Holy Temple, King David himself must be ruled out because of all the spilled blood; his wars may have been necessary and even obligatory, but even the most just of wars brings in its wake excessive killing, often accidental killing of the innocent, emotional hatred and passionate zeal. What the haftora reflects back on is that performing a mitzvah for God which God didn't command – no matter how inspired, spiritually or ecstatically – invites a

disapproving, destructive blaze from heaven. Like Uzzah, Aaron's sons got too close to the sacred, took the sacred into their own hands. Ecstasy, especially in the service of God, can turn into a sacrilegious act of zealotry, of passionate pursuit of God's honor at the expense of human life and respect for others. Passionate religious fire in the name of God can turn into "self-righteous fanaticism" which can tragically lead to the desecration of the divine name, even to suicide bombers.

Nadav and Avihu are rare Jews, sons of Aaron, nephews of Moses, their lives dedicated to service in the Temple, privileged to be among the chosen few to have had a sapphire vision of God's glory back at the sealing of the covenant in the portion of Mishpatim. We cannot even begin to comprehend their spiritual heights. Nevertheless, they die tragically because they brought a passionate fire not commanded by God. When people on the level of Nadav and Avihu fail to distinguish between Divine will and human will, allowing their subjective desires to take over, they are expressing their own emotions but are not necessarily doing the will of the Divine. Confusing our will with God's will is truly playing with fire. If we limit ourselves to God's commands in the ritual realm we can be reasonably certain that we are serving God and not our own egos and subjective hatreds and passions. One dare not get too close to the divine fire, lest one get burnt by that very fire.

The Person in the Parsha

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

And Aaron Was Silent

He was an old man, and in many ways came from a very different world than I. And yet he taught me more than anyone else ever did. One of the things he taught me was that no one suffers as much as a parent who loses a child.

He delivered this lesson to me on a wintry day more than fifty years ago. He was my grandfather, my father's father, and the family had just broken the news to him that his youngest grandchild, my baby cousin, had died. It was a sudden death, totally unexpected, and everyone was distraught. Grandpa too took the news very hard.

He then did something which surprised everyone present. He rose to leave the room, beckoning to me—his oldest grandchild, then fourteen—to accompany him. We both entered a small adjoining room in which there were a few sacred books, including a siddur. He opened the siddur, read from it for several moments, and then looked up to me, and tearfully whispered:

"There is nothing worse in the world than the death of one's own child. A parent never recovers from such a blow. May the merciful God protect us all from such a fate."

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I will never forget those words. I remember them verbatim even today. And a lifetime of experience in the vocation of counseling has confirmed the truth of these words over and over again.

In this week's Torah portion, Parshat Shemini, we read of just such a tragedy. On a bright and sunny spring day, somewhere in the Sinai wilderness, the Tabernacle is being inaugurated. It is an awesome spiritual experience in which "a divine fire descends from on high, in which all the people sing in unison, and fall upon their faces."

It is the moment of a peak experience, for all the people, but especially for Aaron, the High Priest.

At that very moment, his two elder sons, Nadav and Avihu, step forward and commit a sacrilegious act which dispels the mood, and ruins the entire experience. Commentators differ widely as to exactly what was the sin of these two sons of Aaron. Scripture just says that "they offered God a strange fire, something He did not command of them."

God's wrath was expressed instantly. "A fire descended from before Him and consumed them, and they died in the presence of God."

A parent, a father, lost a child. Not just one, but two. Not through a long and debilitating illness but suddenly, unexpectedly. And not in any ordinary set of circumstances, but in the context of an act of sacred worship.

What is Aaron's reaction? Does he moan and groan and rend his clothing? Does he scream out in grief? Or does he vent his anger against the God who took his boys from him?

None of the above. "Vayidom Aharon." Aaron is silent. The silence of shock? Perhaps. The silence of acceptance of fate? Perhaps. Or, perhaps, the silence which results when the range and depth of one's emotions are too overwhelming to express in words. But silence.

If the sage words that my grandfather shared with me in my early adolescence are true, and I have every reason to believe that they are, Aaron remained silent about his grief for the rest of his life. Had he used the words of his ancestor Jacob, he could have said "I will go down to the grave in my agony."

Soon after this episode in which my grandfather shared his wisdom with me I had the occasion to read a book which taught me a bit more about a grieving parent. It is quite possible that it was at precisely during the winter of my cousin's death that I was assigned the book *Death Be Not Proud* by John Gunther in my English Literature class.

I somehow doubt that this book is still on the required reading lists of many tenth-graders

today. But if it is not on those lists I certainly recommend that it be read, and particularly by teenagers who are learning their first lessons about life and its tragic disappointments.

In the book, the author describes his own son, who was taken from him by a vicious disease. He describes his son positively, but realistically. And he rages against the disease, and in some way, the Divine being who took his son from him. He insists to Death itself that it be not proud about its victory over its victim, his dear child.

It has been decades since I have read Gunther's book, and it could very well be that I do not remember it with complete accuracy. But I do recall the poignancy and the power with which the author conveyed the full range of his painful emotions. And I will never forget those passages in which he insists that he will never recover from his loss that the wounds of a parent's grief for his child can never heal.

Many are the lessons which students of Bible and Talmud have derived from the sad narrative contained in this week's Torah portion. But there is at least one lesson which every empathic reader will surely learn as he or she attends to the opening verses of Leviticus 10.

It is the lesson contained in the mystery of Aaron's reaction when his sons are consumed by a heavenly fire. For within the deafening silence of "Vayidom Aharon" are the depths of the terror which every parent dreads, and some parents have suffered. The dread of bereavement, of the loss of one's child.

As always, in contemplating darkness, light stands out in contrast. Reflection upon death leads to an appreciation of life. The story of the death of Aaron's children should, if nothing else, enable us to appreciate all the more those of our children who are alive and well.

As we embark upon this new pre-Passover spring season, with all the springtime symbols in the way of life and renewal, let us celebrate and appreciate all of our own offspring, may they live and be well.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

How Is Being the Kohen Gadol for Seven Days a Punishment?

The first pasuk in this week's parsha says, "It was on the eighth day, Moshe called to Aharon and his sons and to the elders of Israel" [Vayikra 9:1]. The Baal HaTurim writes that the Gematria of the (third, fourth and fifth) words (of this pasuk) "...haShemini Karah Moshe..." (the eighth Moshe called) equals the Gematria of the words "Haya bYom Rosh Chodesh Nissan" (which means "was on the day of the New Month of Nissan").

The eighth day followed seven preparatory days of inauguration of the Mishkan [Tabernacle], which took place during the last

days of the month of Adar. Now who acted as the "Kohen" for the entire inauguration process of the Mishkan? Chazal say it was Moshe Rabbeinu. Chazal say that Moshe commented, "Since I argued with the Almighty by the Burning Bush for seven days about whether I should be the one to lead Klal Yisrael out of Egypt, I only merited serving as the Kohen Gadol for seven days. After this period, I lost the job to my brother Aharon and his descendants.

In the beginning of Parshas Shemos, the Ribono shel Olam came to Moshe and said, "Take the Jews out of Egypt" and Moshe said, "No!" It is clear from the pesukim that this argument went back and forth for quite some time. Chazal say that it went on for seven days. Now Moshe recognized in hindsight, "Because I then refused for seven days, therefore I only had the privilege of acting as the High Priest for seven days." This is the language of the Medrash. This, in fact, is also a Gemara in Tractate Zevachim [102a].

The "original plan," so to speak, was that Moshe's brother Aharon was supposed to be the "Levi" and Moshe Rabbeinu was supposed to be the "Kohen". In that Gemara, Rav Yehoshua ben Korcha states that normally, whenever the Torah uses the term "Charon Af" in connection with the Almighty (indicating His Anger), there are consequences. And yet, even though the Torah uses that term in connection with Moshe's persistent refusal to accept his mission [Shemos 4:14], Moshe does not appear to suffer consequences for this inappropriate behavior.

Rav Shimon ben Yochai responds that here too there were consequences, as it is written (in that very pasuk), "Behold Aharon, your brother, the Levi..." indicating that originally Aharon was supposed to be only the Levi, but now, because of your refusal to immediately accept your mission, Aharon will be the Kohen, the job that was supposed to be yours. "From now on you will be the Levi and he will be the Kohen."

Moshe Rabbeinu lost the Priesthood for himself and his sons after him, because it took seven days of arguments before he agreed to take the Jews out of Egypt. The Baal HaTurim says an incredible thing – because he refused for seven days, therefore he got to be Kohen for seven days! This seems very strange! It seems backwards. Is this a punishment or a reward? It seems counterintuitive. Would we say that had he refused his mission for only one day he would be the Kohen for one day? The longer he refused the longer he is Kohen? This does not make sense! Being the Kohen (even) for seven days seems more like a reward than a punishment!

A number of years ago, we mentioned an answer to this question from Rav Simcha Zissel, the Chevrone Rosh Yeshiva. He said that in truth, it is a punishment. However, why

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did Moshe refuse the mission? He refused for very good and noble reasons – because of his extreme modesty. He felt that he was not worthy enough to accept the position. His humility convinced him that the job should go to his older brother, Aharon. Now, although Moshe refused because of a very appropriate character trait, the Almighty weighs out the actions of the righteous like the width of a thread. He gives them their just rewards and just punishments down to the finest nuance of their actions.

The punishment was that Moshe lost the Priesthood on a permanent basis. However, Moshe was deserving of reward for the noble reason for which he was refusing to lead Klal Yisrael, for his sensitivity and nobility of character. Therefore, the reward was that at least for seven days he would be the Kohen Gadol.

I recently heard another answer to this question on a tape from Rabbi Isaac Bernstein, of blessed memory, who was a Rav in England. He cited a very interesting Medrash Shmuel on Maseches Avos. The Mishna in Avos [4:21] teaches that jealousy, lustfulness, and honor-seeking takes a person out of the world. A person can become obsessed with any of these vices to such an extent that he does crazy things that will cost him his Olam HaBah (the World-to-Come).

The Medrash Shmuel asks, if this is the correct interpretation, the Mishna should be worded differently. It should say, "One who is jealous, lustful, or has desire for honor has no portion in the World-to-Come. The Mishna actually reads "Jealously, lustfulness, and honor-seeking take a person out of the world." It seems from the language of the Mishna that such a person has entered Olam HaBah and then he is extracted from it!

The Medrash Shmuel therefore offers a very novel interpretation: The punishment of a person who has jealousy, lustfulness, or desire for honor in fact involves the loss of his portion of Olam HaBah. However, the punishment is administered by first placing him in Olam HaBah, giving him a brief opportunity to experience it and see what he will be missing, and then taking him out from there!

Someone who loses Olam HaBah without ever having tasted it does not really suffer that much. He does not know what he is missing. However, if he is placed in Olam HaBah for a short time, so he has a chance to luxuriate in the unimaginable pleasure of that experience and then is removed from there, he will feel the magnitude of the punishment.

Rabbi Bernstein suggests that this is the way to reconcile the fact that Moshe was given the opportunity to serve for a week as Kohen Gadol with the Talmudic teaching that he suffered the consequence of "Vayichar Af

Hashem" for having initially persisted in his refusal to accept G-d's Divine mission by losing the Kehunah. If someone loses the Kehunah without ever having experienced it, he does not feel the loss. If someone losses it after having enjoyed its privilege, then it is a big punishment!

I said over this thought recently to someone confined to a wheel chair. We were discussing this Rashi and the Baal HaTurim. I told him this vort from Rav Isaac Bernstein. He told me that he has a friend who has spina bifida. Since shortly after infancy, this friend has been confined to a wheelchair. His friend told him an amazing thing: "If I ever had to come back to this world again as a different Gilgul (via soul transmigration), I would want to come back again with spina bifida. Why? It is because in this condition I go to Camp Simcha, I have such wonderful friends, and people treat me so beautifully. I am happy the way I am. In fact, this life has been so pleasant and so geshmak that if I had to come back again, this is exactly the way I would like to have it." That was his attitude.

The person with whom I was discussing the above idea had not always been confined to a wheelchair. He had once been able to walk and was once a fully functional individual. Now, Rachmana litzlan [May the All Merciful Spare Us (from such suffering)], his illness confines him to a wheelchair. He told me, "I would never say what my friend who has spina bifida said. I know what it is to be able to walk, and I know what it is to be able to be independent. I know what I am missing. For my friend, ignorance is bliss, but I know what it is like, and if I had to do it over, I certainly would not request that this happen to me again.

That was his reaction to this Chazal. Hashem told Moshe, "You see what it is to be a Kohen? That — you cannot have!" We do not appreciate what we have until we have it and lose it. However, if we never had it, there is less of an appreciation of what we do not have.

Hoisted with Their Own Petard

The Torah teaches: "He said to Ahraon: 'Take yourself a calf, a young male of cattle, for a sin offering and a ram for an olah offering, unblemished. And to the Children of Israel speak as follows: Take a he-goat for a sin offering and a calf and a sheep in their first year — unblemished — for an olah offering.'" [Vayikra 9:2-3]. Both Aharon and the Children of Israel had to bring sin offerings as atonements.

The Meshech Chochma quotes a Toras Kohanim: Why was it necessary for the Children of Israel to bring more than Aharon? (They brought both a calf and a goat and he only brought a calf.) It is because they needed to achieve atonement for both what they did previously and what they did most recently. Their original sin was, "They took Yosef's coat and slaughtered a goat..." [Bereshis 37:31].

They still had the sale of Yosef hanging over their heads. In addition, a more recent sin was hanging over their heads, as the Torah says, "...they made for themselves a molten calf and they bowed down to it and slaughtered to it..." [Shemos 32:8]. Therefore, they now needed a goat to atone for the incident involving the goat and they needed to bring a calf to atone for the incident involving a calf.

Rav Meir Simcha (the author of the Meshech Chochma) asks: Why now? The sale of Yosef happened years earlier. Rav Meir Simcha answers that up until now, there may have been a mitigating factor in their actions relating to the sale of Yosef. They felt they might have been somewhat justified. Yosef should not have related evil stories about them to their father. If he had a complaint about their behavior, he should have brought it straight to them. "If he thought we were not treating the sons of the handmaidens appropriately, he should have chastised us directly. Why does he run to our father right away? We are adults; we deserve the courtesy of his direct complaint." That was their original claim to defend themselves: Yosef was not acting like a mensch!

However, now (after the sin of the Golden Calf) where Chur did in fact come to them with a complaint (that they should not be making an idol to replace Moshe — it would be Avodah Zarah!) and they killed him, their original claim of justification was proven to be worthless. We see now what your reaction is with somebody who comes and tries to give you mussar to your face. Do not tell me that Yosef should have done that instead of going to Yaakov with the report of your misbehavior.

This is why now they not only had to bring a calf to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf but they also had to bring a goat to atone for the sin of the sale of Yosef. Retroactively, they indicted themselves.

We see the same phenomenon from a Gemara in Yoma [22b]: "At the moment that the Holy One Blessed Be He said to Shaul 'Go smite Amalek.' (Hashem commanded Shaul to wipe out Amalek — men, women, and children, even the animals) Shaul said (to himself), 'If when one person dies, the Torah requires us to bring a calf to decapitate (as atonement), certainly it is not appropriate to kill out all these souls of Amalek. Also, if man has sinned, what sin did the animals do?'" So Shaul said, "I cannot kill out Amalek, it is too cruel."

The Gemara continues that a Heavenly Voice (Bas Kol) came out and said, "Do not be so righteous." In addition, later when Shaul gave orders to Doeg "You go out and smite the Kohanim (of Nov)," another Heavenly Voice came out and said "Do not be so wicked." (Their terrible 'crime' was that they provided food and shelter for Dovid and his soldiers.) So what happened to Shaul's great compassion at Nov? The answer is that when

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compassion suited him, he invoked it and when compassion did not suit him, he was not at all compassionate.

There is an expression in English [from Shakespeare's Hamlet] "hoisted with his own petard" (a "petard" is a small explosive device). The phrase's meaning is literally that the bomb-maker is blown up ("hoisted" off the ground) by his own bomb. It indicates an ironic reversal or poetic justice. That is exactly what we see here: "If I would have received mussar, I would have listened..." No, way! Look what happened when you did receive mussar, just look how you acted! "Oh I am too compassionate, I cannot kill them. How did the animals sin?" No way! Look what happened to Nov the City of Kohanim!

The Meshech Chochma teaches us that a person's own activities can come back to haunt him. They can come back to indict him. That is why specifically now the Children of Israel needed to bring atonement for the sin of the Sale of Yosef. Retroactively, we see that their claimed excuse is without merit. They were hoisted with their own petard.

Dvar Torah Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

What is special about the number 8?

The fact that this week's parasha is called Shemini, which means 'the eighth', issues an invitation to us to answer this question.

In Kabbalistic teachings, the number six represents the natural world. Hashem created our world in six days, and therefore we work on six days. The number seven represents the perfection of people. On the seventh day we celebrate Shabbat which is known as "M'ein Olam Haba" — the closest we can come in this world, to the perfect spirituality of the world to come. The number nine represents Ha'Kadosh Baruch Hu, it is the divine number.

In maths, quite extraordinarily, a number can only be divided by nine if its digits add up to nine, or a multiple of nine. For example, in the number 459, $4+5+9 = 18$ which is a multiple of 9, and therefore we know it is divisible by 9. It shows that 9 fits perfectly into the world around it, and that is a description of Hashem.

At the end of the Shema, we conclude the words "Hashem Eloheichem" — the Lord your God, but we always add the word 'emet' onto it which means truth. That is because the Talmud teaches us "chotamo shel HaKodesh Baruch Hu emet", the seal of God is truth. The gematria of the word 'emet' adds up to 441, which is $4+4+1$, which equals 9, indicating that the truth of Hashem is represented by the number 9.

So if seven represents the perfection of people, and nine represents Hashem, eight represents the bridge, connecting us with our creator. That is why a baby boy has his 'brit milah' through which he establishes a covenant between himself and Hashem on the eighth day. That is

why the festival of Chanukah is eight days long when we recall the divine intervention which saved our people. And that is why between Pesach and Shavuot for a period of 7×7 days we prepare ourselves for the re-enactment of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Once we reach that number 49, we are prepared for the festival of Shavuot, which takes place at the beginning of the eighth week, reminding us of that ultimate revelation when Hashem appeared to us, and of the first two of the ten commandments. He delivered them directly to us – the ultimate bridge between Heaven and earth.

Now we can understand our parasha, “vayehi b’yom hashemini” – and it came to pass on the eighth day – once the Mishkan (the sanctuary in the wilderness) had been completed, and the altar was there to be dedicated, for seven continuous days the people offered sacrifices with no response from God, but after those seven days, “va teitzei aish min ha Shamayim” – on the eighth day, fire came from Heaven and consumed the animal on the altar – there was that connection between Heaven and earth.

The number eight is a special number which issues a call to us. Let us embrace the natural world represented by the number six. Let us strive to reach our greatest potential for perfection, represented by the number seven. And in that way, may we merit to live up to the aspirations of the number eight, to feel the presence of Hashem in our lives and to enable Him to bless us always.

OTS Dvar Torah: Yigal Klein

Parshat Shemini centers on the terrible agony experienced upon the death of Nadav and Avihu, Aharon’s two sons. The pain in their passing becomes even more significant and heart-wrenching when considering the temporal dimension, namely, the day the Tabernacle was inaugurated, and the dimension of space – the event occurred at the very heart of the most sacred place to the Jewish people. Even as we walk through holiness, exhilarated by the beauty and splendor around us, as the effects of the divine presence understandably leave us breathless, we are overcome with agony and extreme hardship with the passing of Nadav and Avihu. Many explanations were offered for this painful death, and their greatness and fall from grace have elicited countless wake-up calls. I feel that the looming question here regards what we are meant to understand from their demise. What are Nadav and Avihu beckoning us to correct? In which aspects of our worship of God, our life’s labor, must we take greater care?

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch elaborates on this topic, underscoring in his interpretation of the verse that states that Nadav and Avihu had done something “that Hashem had not commanded,” that the sacrificial rites may not be performed arbitrarily or subjectively. Even the voluntary offerings must be performed in the prescribed fashion, “for those who offered

G-d’s sacrifice wish to draw closer to Hashem, but they will only do so by heeding Hashem’s words, and accepting His commandments” (from R. Hirsch’s commentary on Leviticus 10:1).

R. Hirsch continues, elaborating that the role of the kohanim is not invent new ways to perform the rituals of the Tabernacle, but rather to give validity to G-d’s commandments. If we follow the path charted by R. Hirsch, as we perform our life’s labor, we can learn to be attentive, open our hearts to divine directives, and walk in the light of God.

Nadav and Avihu did something that teaches us that despite our eagerness to act out of the exhilaration that takes hold of us, we must always remember our commitment, the commands we must follow, and the imperative to perform all of the commandments God gave us, down to the finest details. Many other commentators painstakingly described every minute detail of the performance of God’s commandments and the required commitment, understanding that “the devil is in the details,” even if, to our mortal eyes, these things aren’t always graspable or simple.

In his Shmona Kvatzim, Rabbi Kook writes the following: “The aspiration for great things, great creations, great sciences, and great standing will make a person devoid of content, content that forms from many tiny particles approaching unceasingly, bit by bit” (Kovetz 8, 38). In life, we often seek the “big storms,” tremendous exhilaration. We look at different events and characters, and think to ourselves that we, too, would like to experience, to be awestruck, to be moved, and to be part of something grand and exciting. It is then that we begin to discover the great secret in the worship of Hashem, in improving our marital life, and in any other facet of life: to achieve the greatest form of excitement, we must first go through the finest details of life, advancing step by step, daily, until this progress eventually grants us those uplifting and awe-inspiring moments.

Any scientist who had ever won the Nobel prize could share this insight with us. It was only after years of meticulous work in the lab, pipetting precise quantities with the greatest of care, that they reached the summit. This is the understanding reached by every couple that invests the hard work required for a meaningful relationship, which ultimately produces a few moments of bliss and intense joy. Likewise, a kohen, who performs his duties with the utmost care and attention to detail, will have experienced a divine revelation.

I would suggest that Nadav and Avihu’s actions should not dissuade us from seeking excitement and “great lights”, or extinguish our passion or our thirst for discovering the living God. It isn’t meant to dispel any hopes for moments of greatness. Nadav and Avihu’s role is to remind us that in order to have these intense experiences, and to draw close to

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Hashem, we must pay attention to the path we take, to the work we must do and to the details that may seem minute to us. Ultimately, God Himself is in the details.

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Rabbi Michael Rosensweig

Birkat Kohanim: An Appropriate

Component and Culmination of the Miluim

“Va-yisa Aharon et Yadav el ha-am va-yevaracheim; va-yeireid mei-asot ha-hatot ve-haolah ve-hashelamim.” At a pivotal juncture, at the climax of the miluim process that initiated Aharon as the kohen gadol and provided his progeny the exclusive prerogative of avodat hakorbonot, rendering the rest of Klal Yisrael the status of zarim, the Torah records that Aharon spread his hands and blessed the nation. It is intriguing to note that the content of this blessing is anonymous; its purpose is undefined; its function mysterious. Moreover, the very next pasuk registers the post-miluim joint national blessing of Moshe and Aharon absent any explication of the relationship to the previous birkat Aharon.

Furthermore, while the rest of the miluim protocol was very specifically scripted, this component is presented as an apparent initiative of Aharon ha-Kohen. (The mefarshim debate whether this is in fact the case. See for example, Ramban ad loc and Panim Yafot.) Moreover, the mefarshim were intrigued by the Torah’s intentionally complex formulation of the order of occurrences. They note (Or haChayim, Ibn Ezra and others) that the terminology employed might mistakenly mislead us to conclude that Aharon’s blessing interrupted the actual process of avodat hakorbonot. Or haChayim and others infer that the Torah intended to convey that while it sequentially followed the korbonot, Aharon intended that his blessing be halachically and conceptually integrated into the korbonot (and miluim) process!

We may better account for this intriguing perspective if we identify the substance of this blessing. Rashi posits that it consists of the very same birkat kohanim that is explicated later in the Torah, in parshat Naso (Bamidbar 6:23-26). Although the Ramban (ad loc) expresses deep reservations about this conclusion, arguing that there is no evidence that the parshah of birkat kohanim is out of order, and implicitly rejecting the notion that this pre-Naso birkat kohanim constituted Aharon’s own initiative, Rashi’s view is reinforced by abundant Talmudic and midrashic evidence.

The Yerushalmi (Taanit 4:1; see also Sifra Shmini ad loc) explicitly asserts that the anonymous content of this blessing is later explicated in the parshah of birkat kohanim (“berachah zu setumah hi ad she-ba hakatuv upirshah: yevarechacha...”). Moreover, Chazal invoke our verse as a source for numerous laws of birkat kohanim. The gemara (Sotah 38a) derives the requirement of nesiat kapayim

from our pasuk. Another gemara (Megillah 18a) also cites "va-yeireid mei-asot..." to establish the placement of birkat kohanim in the Amidah after hodaah. The gemara (Sotah 38a) additionally requires that the kohen proceed to the venue of birkat kohanim already at retzei (avodah) based on this intriguingly placed and worded phrase. The Sifra posits that one should stand during birkat kohanim because our verse integrates Aharon's berachah with the actual avodah, which demands a standing posture. [A number of these conclusions and other laws further reinforce the impression that birkat kohanim was integrated as the actual culmination of the miluim and korbonot process, rather than constituting merely a post- miluim celebration.]

Indeed, even the Ramban (see his formulations ad loc and in Bamidbar 6:23) reluctantly considers that while the daily birkat kohanim that devolves upon all kohanim was initiated only in parshat Naso, there might be have been an earlier, paradigmatic birkat kohanim executed by Aharon at the culmination of the miluim.

Why did Aharon integrate this precursor birkat kohanim specifically into the miluim framework and, evidently, as a kiyum in the avodah itself? [See Or haChayim who links this phenomenon to kapparat ha-eigel. I am positing an alternative approach.] Perhaps because it addressed a critical issue about the unity and normative uniformity of Klal Yisrael and projected a crucial perspective regarding kedushat kehunah and avodat ha-korbonot, notwithstanding a principled and pragmatic policy of spiritual specialization.

The miluim not only established the credentials of Aharon as the kohen gadol, but this day also inaugurated aspects of the special status of the kehunah and avodah itself. The transition from avodat bechor to benei Aharon ha-kohanim according to many views in Chazal took place precisely at this time. [See Shabbat 87a - rishon le-kehunah, rishon le-avodah - and Rashi and mefarshim; Zevachim 115b and mefarshim.] The Sifrei (Shemini) actually links the exclusive prerogative of kehunah and the capacity for nesiat kapayim - "beotah shaah zachah be-matnot kehunah vezachah be-nesiat kapayim lo u-ledorotav at sheyihu meitim".

By integrating this precursor birkat kohanim into the final korbonot and as the culmination of the avodat ha-miluim (not merely its aftermath), Aharon, the paradigm kohen gadol (as reflected in avodat yom hakipurim and the Torah's formulation of that core kohen gadol process in Achrei Mot), subtly but powerfully established that while the actual avodah was to be implemented exclusively by the kohen gadol and kohanei hedyot (even to the extent of establishing the category of "zar"), it necessarily and fundamentally belongs to and includes all of Klal Yisrael. [See also Or

haChayim, parshat Emor.] [Some views on the role of maamadot (the presence of representatives of Klal Yisrael during the avodah) and the discussion of whether kohanim are "sheluchei didan, sheluchei de-Rahmana", or both etc. may reflect these themes, beyond the technical requirement of the baalim of korbonot or their actual agents in temidim and other korbonot tzibur. It is possible that this motif constitutes a core theme in birkat kohanim generally, although the precise relationship between birkat kohanim in the mikdash and medinah, as well as the precursor and Naso iterations require further clarification. I hope to extensively address these themes elsewhere.]

Throughout the miluim process, Chazal register Moshe and Aharon's anxiety (later realized by Korach's challenge), even hypersensitivity lest the election of Aharon and his sons be misconstrued as an expression of elitism or self-aggrandizement rather than as devar Hashem for the benefit of all of Klal Yisrael (see, for example, Rashi 9:1,23. These concerns abound in Chazal and the classical mefarshim). Indeed, the pesukim themselves underscore the participation of all of Klal Yisrael in this kehunah-centric process (see 9:5- "vayichu et asher zivah Moshe el penei ohel moed; va-yikrevu kol ha-eidah va-yaamdu lifnei Hashem.").

[Abudraham, (ch. 11,Beit Yosef, Orach Chaim 128)cites the view of R' Yosef Kimhi, who rejected the girsa "kohanei am kadoshechah" in favor of "kohanim ba-am" as an accurate introduction to birkat kohanim because, "ki einam kohanei yisrael ela kohanei Hashem". However, this or similar girsaot specifically emphasizing that the kohanim serve and represent the rest of Am Yisrael persist in prominent halachic sources. We may posit in light of our analysis, that this emphasis (notwithstanding the parallel halachic issues of kohanim sheluchei didan or sheluchei rahmana) may be particularly appropriate in the context of birkat kohanim.]

While the Torah pursues a policy of spiritual specialization in certain of its realms, most prominently regarding matters of avodat ha-Mikdash ve-korbonot, all taryag mizvot connect to the totality of, and also each member of Am Yisrael, as values, as talmud Torah (that also dictates "ke-ilu hikrivan"-see end of Menachot) but even as actual mizvot. Birkat kohanim by means of nesiat kapayim initiated by Aharon at a pivotal transitional moment and perceived and portrayed as the final act, culmination, and kiyum of the avodah-miluim, rather than simply as an extraneous celebration, emphatically declares this axiomatic principle.

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by Rabbi Label Lam

Being His

For I am HASHEM your G-d, and you shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, because I am holy, and you shall not defile yourselves through any creeping creature that crawls on the ground. (Vayikra 11:44)

For I am HASHEM your G-d: Just as I am Holy, I am HASHEM your G-d, so too you shall make yourselves holy (i.e.) sanctify yourselves below on earth. ...and be holy: before Me, for I shall make you holy in the World to Come. (Rashi)

In the context of this call for holiness the Chumash is speaking of refraining from disgusting foods. How does that express holiness? How does that make us holy? What is holiness? How can we define it in pedestrian terms?

This is a scene from more than 36 years. I can recall it now like it happened this morning. I just exited the Yeshiva where I was teaching English. My main classroom management tool was to have candy in each pocket. As I approached the street I noticed a frightening scene. Two little boys were on the other side of a crazy busy intersection waiting to cross. They 6 or 7 years old and I recognized one of them to be the young son of one of my Rebbeim. I couldn't let these kids cross by themselves.

I signaled to them to wait for me. I ran across the street and took each one by the hand with a candy in each hand. When we got to the other side of the street one boy thanked me and left with the candy in hand and smile on his face.

Tzvi Elimelech, my Rabbi's son asked me, "What's the Heksher?" I took the two clear cellophane bags out of my pocket. Both tops were already removed. I told him they we either Paskesz or Blooms and I bought them both at the one Kosher store in Monsey at that time, Nagels. Everybody goes there even his parents. He stood there and with perfect poise, handed me the candy.

He politely thanked me and proceeded to happily skip home. I was stunned. He knew me! I was just giving these candies out in the Yeshiva across the street. Nobody questioned me there. What a great beginning for a future Ben Torah.

That's holiness! Effortless self control, beyond the battle ground where the elements are controlling and tempting us, to be that free and able to easily and happily say "No!" That's a portrait of a kid with a candy! How many other battle grounds with the "permissible" do we "adults" struggle with daily?!

This is excerpted from a newsletter Doresh L'Tzion: "The Mashgiach of Lakewood, R' Nosson Wachtfogel zt"l. related: I heard from Maran R' Aharon Kotler zt"l that he had a tradition passed down from the Chofetz Chaim

that the “Last Battle” will be the “Beginning of the Geulah”, and that a true Ben Torah who will be completely disconnected from the nations will not be dominated over. In this vein, the Mashgiach said that he himself has a tradition handed down from one person to another from R’Yehoshua Leib Diskin zt”l, the Seraph of Brisk, that “In the Last Battle before the coming of Moshiach all the Ehrl-icke Yidden will be saved”. What is the definition of “Ehrliche Yidden”? Those who are separated from the nations! He explained that this is not referring to being one of the Thirty-Six Hidden Tzaddikim, but rather about whoever separates himself from the customs of the nations and has no connection to their culture, their manner of dressing, their newspapers or music or books, and is completely disassociated from them – then to him Hakadosh Boruch Hu says, “You are Mine!” And he is under a completely different authority and there is no dominion over him!””

Holiness is first claiming dominion over one’s self! The Torah invites us all and declares us capable of Being His!

Bar Ilan University: Dvar Torah

Drink No Intoxicants

By Yehudah Zoldan¹

Priests serving in the Temple and

instructors of Halakhah - Priests are forbidden to drink wine or intoxicants when officiating in the Sanctuary: Drink no wine or other intoxicant, you or your sons, when you enter the Tent of Meeting, that you may not die.

This is a law for all time throughout the ages, for you must distinguish between the sacred and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean; and you must teach the Israelites all the laws which the Lord has imparted to them through Moses (Lev. 10:9-11).

Excessive drinking, resulting in inebriation, impairs one’s judgment and conduct, and diminishes the ability to distinguish between sacred and profane, between unclean and clean. The priests are charged with instructing the Israelites in the laws of the Torah, and someone whose intellectual faculties are impaired is not capable of instructing properly, as required.

This command appears in the context of the sin committed by Nadab and Abihu, and is intended also to rule out the possibility of officiating in the Sanctuary in a burst of passion and derangement of one’s senses. Worship of the Lord, especially in the Sanctuary, must be done with great zest, but without being cut off from one’s wits, from the

ability to discern and to instruct. This is how Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch put it:

After drinking even such a small quantity no *avodah* (officiating) in the *mikdash* (Sanctuary) may be undertaken (v. 9), no decision made with reference to the *mikdash* (v. 10), nor any practical application of the laws of the Torah taught (v. 11). Not the unclear realm of excited feelings and phantasy, but the tranquil clarity and sharpness of sober intelligence is what the Word of Gd demands for all its fulfillment. Not to phantasy, [but] to the clear and understanding mind does the symbolism of the Sanctuary speak.

Only the clear and comprehending mind, keeping everything in its right proportion and its right place, is able to guide our steps and decide for us what is the right way to carry out the dictates of Gd’s Torah. The corpses of the first youthful priests, fallen through the lofty inspirations of their stirred feelings, preach the solemn warning to all future priests and leaders of the Jewish Teaching... (R. S. R. Hirsch, trans. Dr. Isaac Levy, p. 259).

Hence a priest who has drunk wine to the point of inebriation and then officiated in the Sanctuary is liable for death at the hand of Gd, and his service is not acceptable. If he became inebriated from some other drink, he is liable for flogging but his service is valid (see Maimonides, *Hilkhot Bi’at ha-Mikdash*, 1.1-2).

The prohibition against drinking wine is directed at the priests officiating in the Sanctuary, but the explanations of the underlying reason for this prohibition are true and good for any person who is required to discern and distinguish between things, and are surely applicable when a person is called upon to teach and lead. Maimonides ruled (*loc. cit.*, 3):

Just as a priest is forbidden to enter the Temple while intoxicated, so too, it is forbidden for any person, whether priest or Israelite, to render a halachic ruling when he is intoxicated. Even if he ate dates or drank milk and his mind became somewhat confused, he should not issue a ruling, as [the above passage (Lev. 10:11)] continues: “And to give instruction to the children of Israel.”

This ruling was given with respect to rabbis and those who rule on *halakhah*, but the principle can be expanded to cover any person who must be discerning, anyone who must have good control of his mind and behavior.

A person is considered liable at all times—whether acting intentionally or unintentionally, whether asleep or awake or intoxicated - One of the negative examples

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common these days is that of driving “under the influence,” after having had too much alcohol or having taken drugs. In such a situation a person’s senses become fogged, the person is not aware of what is happening around him and is not capable of controlling his actions, certainly not with the necessary alertness. In such an instance, the same principle should be applied to him: a person who drives under the influence has transgressed the law, even if he has not caused any injury to another party.

Rabbinic authorities have asked what law applies to a person who has caused another’s death while drunk or under the influence of drugs. In the *gemara* (*Eruvin* 65a) it says:

The sale or purchase of an intoxicated person is valid. If he committed a transgression involving the penalty of death he is to be executed, and if he committed one involving flogging he is to be flogged; the general rule being that he is regarded as a sober man in all respects except that he is exempt from prayer.

Rabbi Hanina said: This applies only to one who did not reach the stage of Lot’s drunkenness, but one who did reach such a stage is exempt from all responsibilities.

It might seem from this *baraita* that when the level of intoxication is high, a person is exempt from punishment. But Rabbi Yoel Sirkis (*Resp. Bayit Hadash*, [old edition] par. 62) is not of this opinion. He deliberated the case of a drunken person at a wedding who threw a piece of glass at the wall, and a splinter hit his friend in the eye and blinded him. According to Rabbi Sirkis, someone as drunk as Lot is exempt in those matters mentioned in the *baraita*, such as responsibility for what he does in commercial transactions, but regarding other matters he writes:

When it comes to damages, there is no doubt that he is liable, for he ought to have taken care from the outset not to get as drunken as Lot and cause harm to others. For who forced him to get so intoxicated that he did not know what he was doing? Since he was not coerced by anyone but himself, he caused this himself, and so he is liable for damages. Even if he slept—for one cannot manage without sleep—even then he is liable for damages. All the more so someone who is intoxicated is considered an utter criminal.

Even Maimonides ruled that an intoxicated person is always liable (*Hilkhot Hovel u-Mazik* 1.11): A person is considered liable at all times—whether acting intentionally or unintentionally, whether asleep or awake or **intoxicated**.² If he injures a colleague or

¹ Indeed, even on Purim, when we are commanded to get drunk, halakhic authorities caution us about the dangers that might ensue, even as far as bloodshed, and hence have set limits to the drinking. Rabbi Joseph Caro, for one, writes: “It says in *Orhot Hayyim* (*Hilkhot Purim* 38) that a person must drink on Purim, not that one get completely drunk, for drunkenness is utterly forbidden. There is no greater transgression than this, for it leads to illicit sexual acts and blood shed as well as other transgressions; but one should drink more than just a little” (*Beit Yosef, Orach Hayyim* 695.1-2). On a drunken person being liable for damages should he cause injury to another, see my book: *Zemanei Yehudah ve-Yisrael*, “*Shikhrut be-Furim u-Ftor mi-Kiyyim Mitzvot—be-Piskei ha-RaYah Kook*,” pp. 472-488, and note 21.

² Also see: Gideon Liebson, “Criminal Responsibility of the Drunk in Jewish Law,” [Heb.], *Dinei Yisrael* 3(1971):71-88; Rabbi Ro’i Tzvi Tamir, “*Be-Gidrei Shikkor ve-Hityuva be-Nezokin ve-’Onashim*,” *Meir Netivim*, pp. 182-185.

damages a colleague's property, he must always reimburse him from his choicest property.

The basic argument of Rabbi Yoel Sirkis is that a drunken person bears criminal responsibility because he himself is the one who got him into such a state. The drunken person chose to get drunk and therefore must bear the results.

It appears that today there is an even stronger argument than that of *Bayit Hadash* for making drunken drivers bear full responsibility. Drivers are cautioned time and again not to drink to the point of intoxication if they must drive afterwards. They are asked to see to it beforehand that one member of their group be designated not to drink so that he or she will be able to drive their friends' home. Drinking to the point of intoxication is a person's conscious choice, and if the person does so, notwithstanding the numerous warnings not to drive in such a state, and then causes someone's death, that person should be viewed as a murderer.

Rabbi Shlomo Luria (*Yam shel Shlomo, Bava Kama* 3.3) is also of the opinion that a drunken person is liable for damages, but he explains the *gemara* from Tractate *Eruvin* in a different way: A drunken person, even if more drunk than Lot, in any event is liable to pay for any damages. What is concluded in *Perek Hadar* (*Eruvin* 65a)—that a person as drunken as Lot is exempt from the death penalty issued by a court and is not subject to flogging—means he is exempt in the heavenly court regarding that sin. But in any event, he is judged for not controlling himself and for drinking to the point of loosing his senses.

As for exempting him from the laws about causing harm to others—he is simply liable. For a human being is always considered liable, whether intentionally or unintentionally, whether awake or asleep, whether coerced or of his own free will. For were it otherwise, it would be impossible to live, since anyone who hated another would get drunk and do harm to the other yet be exempt. Even on Purim, when it is obligatory to get drunk, the Rabbis did not mean to the point of loosing one's senses. Only as Maimonides wrote (*Hilkhot Megillah* 2.15), one should drink to the point of falling asleep.

According to Rabbi Shlomo Luria, the exemption is from divine justice, but in human courts, the person is liable. The drunken person is held responsible “for not controlling himself and for drinking to the point of losing his senses.”

The Sages, moralists and philosophers have cautioned us in an effort reduce drunkenness and drug abuse, as well. An example of this, one of many sources that could be cited, is found in Numbers Rabbah (Vilna ed.), 10:2: *Do not ogle that wine, for it is red* [yit'adam], *as he sets his eye on the cup* [ba-kos], *as it flows on smoothly* (Prov. 23:31). The Holy Spirit issues a warning against wine, that one should not become inebriated. Why? *For it is*

red [yit'adam]; that is, it ends in bloodshed; since he commits a transgression for which he incurs the death penalty. Another interpretation: *For it is red*: that is, he will lust after the blood [dam] of the menstruant and the blood of the woman who is a *zava* (*a state of ritual impurity applicable to females arising from blood discharges not during the usually anticipated menstrual cycle*). *As he sets his eye on the cup*: the written form is *ba-kis*, on the “pocket.” Through the cup, he will come to set his eye on the pocket, a euphemism for cohabiting with a forbidden relative...Another interpretation: *As it flows on smoothly*: He will end by declaring transgressions permissible and making them freely accessible to all.

Life is for instilling with content and positive action, not for fleeing from by dulling one's senses, dragging the drunk or the drug addict down and leading to the most undesirable behavior. “Drunkenness depends of the free will of an evil man” (Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* 3.8). *Translated by Rachel Rowen*

PARSHAT SHMINI

For some reason, the dedication of the Mishkan required two consecutive ceremonies:

- 1) The seven day "miluim" service - which was the final topic of Parshat Tzav (see Vayikra 8:1-36); &
- 2) The special korbanot offered on "yom ha'shmini" - the 'eighth day' - i.e. at the conclusion of those seven days - the first topic in Parshat Shmini (see 9:1-24).

As the details of these two ceremonies are very different, it would only make sense to assume that each one served a different purpose.

In the following shiur, we attempt to uncover the purpose of each of these two ceremonies, while showing how their presentation in Sefer Vayikra can also help us arrive at a deeper understanding of how we celebrate the holidays of Yom Kippur and Shavuot.

INTRODUCTION

The Torah's description of these two ceremonies in Sefer Vayikra is certainly an anomaly, as this is the only section of narrative in the entire book - everything else in Sefer Vayikra is simply laws!

Therefore, in our shiur, we must explain not only what this narrative is about, but we must also explain why it is 'inserted' at this point in Sefer Vayikra. To do so, we begin our shiur with a quick review of the first half of the Sefer Vayikra, to identify the precise point where this story is told.

WHAT 'BELONGS' IN SEFER VAYIKRA

Vayikra began with the laws of korbanot that the individual **can** (chapters 1-3) or **must** bring (chapters 4-5); and continued with the laws for **how** the kohanim should offer these korbanot (chapters 6-7).

At this point (towards the end of Parshat Tzav /see 8:1), this continuous presentation of mitzvot is 'interrupted' by a set of stories in chapters 8 thru 10:

- Chapter 8 describes the seven day "miluim" inauguration ceremony of the kohanim and the mizbayach,
- Chapter 9 describes the Mishkan's inaugural ceremony on "Yom ha'Shmini" [the 'EIGHTH day'] when God's glory 'returns',
- Chapter 10 describes the story of the tragic death of Nadav and Avihu on that day.

Then, in chapter 11, Sefer Vayikra returns once again to its presentation of various laws pertaining primarily to the Mishkan. [This presentation of LAWS continues till the end of the Sefer!]

[Parshat Shmini concludes with the laws of "tumat ochlin" (see 11:1-47); then Tazria/Metzora continues with other laws relating to "tumah".]

This peculiarity becomes more acute when we consider that this entire narrative (i.e. in Vayikra chapters 8-10) may actually 'belong' in Sefer Shmot. Recall how Sefer Shmot concluded with the story of Mishkan's assembly and its dedication. [In case you forgot, review chapter 40, especially 40:12-14!]

Furthermore, the story of the seven-day "miluim" most definitely 'belongs' in Sefer Shmot. Recall that its original commandment was first recorded in Parshat Tezaveh (see Shmot chapter 29, compare with Vayikra chapter 8). Considering that Parshiot Vayakhel/Pkudei record the fulfillment of every other commandment recorded in Parshiot Trumah/Tzaveh, there is no apparent reason why the seven-day "miluim" ceremony should be the only exception!

In summary, we have shown that stories (in general) don't belong in Sefer Vayikra, while this specific one DOES belong in Sefer Shmot. Hence, our shiur must explain why the Torah prefers placing this story in Vayikra in what appears to be an 'interruption' to its presentation of the mitzvot.

To do so, we must first explain the difference between the details of the Mishkan found in Sefer Shmot in contrast to those found in Vayikra. Then will discuss what is special about each of the two dedication ceremonies to explain why they are recorded specifically in Sefer Vayikra (and not in Shmot).

BETWEEN SHMOT AND VAYIKRA

There is a very simple distinction that explains why we find the laws concerning the Mishkan in two different books. Sefer Shmot describes the details of its construction, while Sefer Vayikra explains how to use it. For example, recall how Shmot chapters 25-31 (Parshiot Terumah/Tezaveh) constituted a distinct unit describing the commandment to BUILD the Mishkan, while chapters 35-40 (Parshiot Vayakhel/Pkudei) detailed how it was actually built. In contrast, the first seven chapters of Sefer Vayikra explain the various korbanot the individual can (or must) bring and how the Kohanim are to offer them.

However, for some reason the details of the seven-day miluim ceremony are recorded in both Shmot and Vayikra! Parshat Tezaveh details its commandment, while Parshat Tzav tells the story of how it took place. To understand why, we must consider the purpose of this ceremony, and relate it to the above distinction.

THE SEVEN DAY "MILUIUM" CEREMONY

Let's review the primary elements of this ceremony:

- 1) First, Moshe must anoint the Mishkan, its vessels, the kohanim, and the "bigdei kehuna", using the "shemen ha'mishcha" oil (see 8:5-13).
- 2) Then, on each day three korbanot are offered:
 - A CHATAT - one "par" (bull)- the blood is sprinkled on the upper section of the MIZBAYACH
 - An OLAH - one "ayil" (ram)- the blood is sprinkled on the bottom of the MIZBAYACH
 - The MILUM offering (like a SHLAMIM) - one "ayil" (ram) - the blood is sprinkled on the KOHANIM.
 (see Shmot 29:1-37 & Vayikra 8:14-24)

This anointing ceremony can easily be understood as the final stage of the Mishkan's construction. So too the korbanot, for the sprinkling of their blood also appears to be a type of anointing. From this perspective, this ceremony should be included in Sefer Shmot, at the conclusion of the set of laws to build the Mishkan. [And that is exactly where we find it (see Shmot chapter 29 and the TSC shiur on Parshat Tezaveh).]

On the other hand, the ceremony is also the FIRST time that korbanot are actually offered. Hence, it also serves as the first FUNCTION of the Mishkan, for this is the first time that it is being 'used'. Hence, the details of the ceremony are also recorded in Sefer Vayikra, together with the other laws how to use the Mishkan.

[The deeper meaning of this is discussed in Part Two.]

With this in mind, let's discuss the purpose of the additional ceremony that takes place on the 'eighth day'.

YOM HA'SHMINI

On "Yom Ha'shmini", the day following the completion of the seven day 'miluim', the Mishkan becomes fully functional. Furthermore, on this day, Aharon and his sons will officiate for the first time. Thus, a special inaugural ceremony is necessary (see 9:1-24), which will be quite different than the seven day 'miluim'.

On this day, we find a commandment to offer a special set of korbanot whose purpose is stated explicitly:

"This is what Hashem has commanded you to do IN ORDER THAT the PRESENCE of God ('kvod Hashem') may APPEAR to you" (9:6) [see also 9:5]

Recall that due to the sins of "chet ha'egel" God had taken away His "shchinah" from the camp of Bnei Yisrael, the very same "shchinah" that Bnei Yisrael had witnessed at Ma'amad Har Sinai: "Moshe took the tent and pitched it OUTSIDE the camp, FAR AWAY from the camp and called it the OHEL MOED. Anyone who sought God would have to go the Ohel Moed located OUTSIDE the camp." (See Shmot 33:7 and its context)

When Moshe ascended Har Sinai to receive the second luchot, God promised him that His "shchinah" would indeed return to the camp (see 34:8-10), however it was first necessary for Bnei Yisrael to build the Mishkan to facilitate its return. [Note Shmot 25:8 - "v'asu li mikdash v'shachanti B'TOCHAM" - in contrast to 33:7.]

Once the construction of the Mishkan was complete, the special korbanot of Yom ha'Shmini mark its climax - for they will facilitate the RETURN of the SHCHINA:

"For today God's glory (kvod Hashem) will appear to you" (9:5) [See also 9:23-24, compare with Shmot 24:16-18.]

Therefore, the special korbanot offered during this ceremony serve a double purpose, reflecting this background:

- (1) They must atone for the sins of "chet ha'egel".
- (2) They must recreate the experience of Ma'amad Har Sinai.

This is precisely what we find:

(1) Due to CHET HA'EGEL:

Aharon must bring a chatat and olah:

"He said to Aharon: Take an 'EGEL' for a CHATAT..." (9:2)

Bnei Yisrael must also bring a chatat and olah:

"Speak to Bnei Yisrael saying: Take a 'seir' for a chatat and a 'EGEL' and a 'keves' for an olah..." (9:3)

(2) To 'recreate' MA'AMAD HAR SINAI:

Bnei Yisrael must also offer a Korban Shlamim together with their olot, just as they had offered when God appeared onto them during Ma'amad Har Sinai (see Shmot 24:4-11, read carefully!).

"[to Bnei Yisrael, cont'd,...] and a 'shor' and 'ayil' for a SHLAMIM to offer before God, and a mincha, FOR TODAY GOD WILL APPEAR TO YOU." (9:4)

[This parallel emphasizes, once again, the purpose of the Mishkan as a perpetuation of Har Sinai.]

YOM HA'SHMINI / YOM KIPPUR AND SHAVUOT

Although the special korbanot of Yom ha'Shmini were a 'one-time event', we find a very similar set of korbanot that are offered every year on Yom Kippur which reflect this very same purpose.

YOM KIPPUR

Recall from Vayikra chapter 16 that on Yom Kippur a special Chatat and Olah are offered by the Kohen Gadol and another set are offered by Bnei Yisrael. Recall as well that these korbanot are offered on the very same day that Bnei Yisrael received atonement for chet ha'egel!

The following table highlights this parallel:

YOM HA'SHMINI YOM KIPPUR (in Acharei Mot)
AHARON

Chatat:	EGEL	PAR (an adult egel)
Olah:	AYIL	AYIL

BNEI YISRAEL

Chatat:	SE'IR	SE'IR
Olah:	KEVES	AYIL (an adult keves)
EGEL	- - (+ korbanot in Pinchas i.e. par ayil & k'vasim)	

[The basic structure of korbanot is the same. The minute differences can be explained due to the special nature of Yom Ha'Shmini. See Further Iyun Section.]

Hence, Yom Kippur can be understood as an annual rededication of the Mishkan, especially from the perspective of its purpose as a site where Bnei Yisrael can receive atonement for their sins.

SHAVUOT

Even though the primary parallel to Yom ha'Shmini is clearly Yom Kippur, there was an additional korban SHLAMIM offered on Yom ha'Shmini that doesn't find a parallel on Yom Kippur. [This only stands to reason, as a korban Shlamim is eaten, and on Yom Kippur we are not allowed to eat.] However, we do find a parallel to this korban on Shavuot, which just so happens to be the only holiday when Bnei Yisrael offer a 'collective' Korban Shlamim:

"And with the 'shtei ha'lechem' you shall offer an olah... a chatat... and two lambs for a ZEVACH SHLAMIM" (Vyk 23:19)

Recall as well that the first time Bnei Yisrael offered a shlamim was at Ma'amad Har Sinai (see Shmot 24:5). As the Mishkan was to perpetuate that experience, we find a korban Shlamim offered at the inaugural ceremony of the Mishkan on Yom ha'Shmini. To remember that event, we offer a special korban Shlamim (shel tzibur) every year on Shavuot, commemorating Ma'amad Har Sinai. It is not by chance that this korban, like the korbanot of Yom ha'Shmini, is offered at the completion of seven cycles of seven days.

NADAV AND AVIHU

At the conclusion of this ceremony, Nadav and Avihu are punished by death for offering "aish zara" which God had NOT COMMANDED (see 10:1-2). Again we find a parallel to Har Sinai and chet ha'egel. At Har Sinai, Bnei Yisrael AND the Kohanim were forewarned:

"And God told Moshe: Go down and WARN the people that they must not break through [the barrier surrounding] Har Sinai, lest they gaze at Hashem and perish. The KOHANIM also, who COME NEAR HASHEM, must sanctify themselves ("yitkadashu" - compare "b'krovei akadesh"/10:3), lest God punish them." (Shmot 19:21)
[See also Chizkuni on Vayikra 10:3-4.]

As this inaugural ceremony parallels the events of Har Sinai, the warning concerning approaching Har Sinai also applies to the Mishkan. Extra caution was necessary.

Similarly, just as Aharon, despite his good intentions, had sinned at Chet ha'egel, in suggesting an action which GOD HAD NOT COMMANDED, so too his children Nadav and Avihu. Despite their good intention when offering this "aish zarah", God DID NOT COMMAND them to do so! [Recall the repetition of "ka'asher tzivah Hashem et Moshe in Parshiot Vayakhel/Pekudei.]

Because of these events, i.e. the improper entry of Nadav and Avihu into the Mishkan, Sefer Vayikra continues at this point with a discussion of the laws of "tumah v'tahara", which regulate who is permitted and who is forbidden to enter the Mishkan (chaps 11-16).

WHY IN SEFER VAYIKRA?

Now that we have explained the purpose of these two dedication ceremonies, we must explain why this lone lengthy narrative of Sefer Vayikra is recorded in this sefer instead of in Sefer Shmot.

One could suggest that this narrative, even though it may technically 'belong' in Sefer Shmot, is recorded specifically in Sefer Vayikra because of the special connection between this narrative and the laws of korbanot in Sefer Vayikra:

The special "ayil" offered during the 'seven day miluim' ceremony, we explained, serves as the 'prototype' for the korban SHLAMIM for it included the separation of the "chazeh v'shok" for the kohen offering the korban. Therefore, this narrative is recorded immediately after the laws of the korban SHLAMIM in Parshat Tzav (see 7:35-37 & last week's shiur).

Similarly, the special korbanot offered on Yom ha'Shmini can be understood as the 'prototype' for the yearly korbanot offered yearly on Yom Kippur as detailed later in chapter 16, and the special

korban Shlamim offered on Shavuot as explained later in chapter 23. Finally, the narrative describing Nadav & Avihu's forbidden entry in the Kodesh serves as the introduction to an entire set of laws concerning who CAN and who CANNOT enter the Mikdash, beginning in chapter 11 and continuing thru chapter 16.

Accordingly, we can continue to understand Sefer Vayikra as a 'book of laws' - "torat kohanim". However, it includes this narrative describing the dedication of the Mikdash for that story serves as the basis for various types of korbanot that are offered in the Mishkan.

In the shiurim to follow, we will continue to discuss this theme.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

PART TWO - "KEDUSHA" in the 'SEVEN DAY' MILUIUM CEREMONY

Review once again the details in chapter 8, noting how there is something special about the MIZBAYACH and the KOHANIM. Even though the sprinkling of the "shemen hamishcha" was sufficient to sanctify the Mishkan and its vessels, the MIZBAYACH and the KOHANIM required an additional procedure. Furthermore, unlike the other vessels, the mizbayach was anointed SEVEN times (see Vayikra 8:11).

To understand why this additional procedure was necessary, we must note the use of the word "l'kadesh" in this 'parshia'. Note the Torah's use of the word "l'kadesh" in Vayikra 8:10-12, 8:15, 8:30,34-35 as well as Shmot 29:1,34-37! Clearly, the purpose of these seven days was to sanctify - "l'kadesh" - the Mishkan.

The Hebrew word "l'kadesh" means 'to set aside' or 'to designate'. For example, in Breishit 2:3, God sets aside the seventh day ["va'ykadesh oto"] to make it special, and in Shmot 13:1, God commands "kadesh li kol bchor" - set aside for Me every first born. Similarly, God is "kadosh", as He is set aside, divine, above all.

Hence, the purpose of these procedures of the "miluim" ceremony was to 'designate' (and hence sanctify) the Mishkan and its vessels for a Divine purpose. However, the MIZBAYACH and the KOHANIM required a little 'extra' sanctification.

To explain why, we must return to our conclusion from our shiur on Parshat Tezaveh that the Mishkan [= OHEL MOED, a tent of meeting] served as the place where Bnei Yisrael could 'meet' God. However, this 'meeting' was distanced, as each 'partner' had his special realm:

- The KODESH KEDOSHIM - where the ARON is placed represents God's presence in the Mishkan; and
- The MIZBAYACH - where the Bnei Yisrael's korbanot are offered, represents Am Yisrael, and their attempt to serve Him.

However, in light of the events of "chet ha'egel" [see TSC shiur on Parshat Ki-tisa] it became apparent how Bnei Yisrael were barely worthy of this encounter. It was only God's attributes of Mercy that allowed His "shechina" to dwell in the Mishkan. One could suggest that to emphasize this very point, an extra procedure is required specifically for the KOHANIM and for the MIZBAYACH, for they represent Bnei Yisrael in this encounter.

[Note that immediately after Matan Torah, the mizbayach is referred to as a "mizbach ADAMAH" (see Shmot 20:21). This may relate to man's name - "adam" and his creation in Gan Eden "afar min ha'adamah". This is reflected in the Midrash that claims that this "afar" was taken from Har HaMoriah, the site of the mizbayach of the Akeydah, and later to become the site of the Temple.]

WHY SEVEN?

Why must this "hakdasha" be repeated for seven days?

Whenever we find the number 'seven' in Chumash, it invariably relates to perek aleph in Breishit, i.e. the story of God's creation of nature, in seven days.

God's very first act of "kedusha" was to 'set aside' the SEVENTH day, to mark His completion of the Creation process (see Br. 2:1-4). By 'resting' on this day, man is constantly reminded of the divine purpose of His creation. Thus, the "kedusha" of shabbat reflects this divine purpose of creation.

Similarly, any procedure that includes the number seven (be it seven items, seven times, seven days, seven weeks, seven years etc.) emphasizes man's requirement to recognize the purpose of his creation. By repeating this procedure of "kedushat ha'mizbayach v'hakohanim" for seven days, the purpose of the mizbayach to become a vehicle through which man can come closer to God is emphasized.

[Once again, we find a connection between the function of the Mishkan and the purpose of the creation. This was discussed in the shiur on Parshat Vayakhel. It is supported by numerous Midrashim which view the construction of the Mishkan as the completion of Creation. Compare carefully Shmot 39:32 to Br.2:1; and Shmot 39:43 to Br.1:31 & 2:3!]

With this background, we can suggest that the seven day miluim ceremony serves a double purpose, thus explaining why its details is found twice.

In Sefer Shmot, the "miluim" service infuses the Mishkan and its vessels with the necessary "kedusha", and hence becomes an integral stage of the Mishkan's CONSTRUCTION. Therefore, its commandment is included in Trumah/Tzaveh together with all the other commandments to build the Mishkan.

In Sefer Vayikra it initiates the use of the Mizbayach, the primary FUNCTION of the Mishkan. The korbanot offered during the miluim represent the basic categories of sacrifices that will be brought by man on the Mizbayach:
the Chatat - "the korban chova";
the Olah - the "korban n'dava";
the Ayl ha'miluim - the prototype of the "korban shlamim";
(see Further Iyun Section).

Therefore, this narrative that describes the offering of the korbanot during this ceremony is included in Sefer Vayikra, and juxtaposed to the laws of Korbanot (Parshiot Vayikra/Tzav).

[Note now 7:37 and the inclusion of "torat ha'miluim" in the summary pasuk of Parshat Tzav!]

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. During the seven day miluim, the "shemen ha'mishcha" oil was used to dedicate the Mishkan and its vessels. Relate this to the story of Yaakov's neder in Bet-tel as described in Breishit 28:18-22 and 35:9-14!.

B. In contrast to the korbanot of 'seven day miluim', the commandment to offer the special korbanot of "Yom ha'Shmini" are never mentioned beforehand, not even in Trumah/Tzaveh!

1. Relate this to their function as atonement for Chet ha'Egel.

2. Relate this to the machloket Rashi/Ramban concerning when Trumah/Tzaveh was given (before or after Chet haEgel)?

3. How does Aharon's korban on the seven day miluim relate to his korban on Yom Shmini?

See Rashi on 9:1-2, noting that he states that Aharon's "egel" on Yom ha'Shmini was to INFORM us that God had forgiven Aharon for chet ha'egel, in contrast to Ramban who explains the the "egel" itself was because Aharon still needed kapara for chet ha'egel. Explain this Rashi based on Rashi on Shmot 29:1-2 and his machloket with Ramban concerning WHEN the commandment to build the Mishkan was given.

C. The korbanot of the seven day miluim ceremony can be seen as the symbol of all korbanot which will be offered on the mizbayach.

The category of chatat could include the subcategory of asham ("k'chatat k'asham" ...).

The category of olah could include all korbanot n'dava which are kodsehi kodshim, including mincha. The category of ayl ha'miluim includes all korbanot n'dava which are kodshim kalim.

1. Note the similarities between the ayl ha'miluim and the standard korban shlamim, especially in regard to the chazeh and shok.

8:25,29. See also 8:31. Relate this to 7:28-37, especially to the fact that in 7:37 miluim precedes zevach ha'shlamim!

2. Note that in Parshat Tzaveh, the laws of korban Tamid follow the commandment of the miluim (see Shmot 29:38-41).

Use this to explain the significance of the korban Tamid, and its function as the continuation of Har Sinai. Relate to Bamidbar 28:6!

Relate this to the other "avodot tamid" in the Mishkan.

3. Note also that during the seven day miluim ceremony, the "dam chatat" is sprinkled on the four corners on TOP of the mizbayach, while the "dam olah" is sprinkled on the BOTTOM. Explain the meaning of these two sections of the mizbayach.

D. The pattern of seven days followed by the 'eighth day' is also found in "brit milah", succot and shmini atzeret, shavuot after seven weeks, yovel after seven shmitot, korbanot machshirin of metzora and zav. [Find other examples.] Based on the above shiur, explain why.

E. To better understand the punishment of Nadav and Avihu, review Shmot 19:20-25, 24:1 & 8-9, and compare to Vayikra 10:1-3.

F. The parallel korbanot brought on Yom ha'Shmini and at Ma'amad Har Sinai are far from identical. Although both events include "korbanot olot & shlamim", there are several differences on 'Yom ha'Shmini'. The following table compares the korbanot of both events and notes the differences with a '*' followed by a letter:

HAR SINAI	YOM HA'SHMINI
AM YISRAEL:	
A Chatat - 'seir' (goat)	
Olah - par (bull)	*B* Olah - 'egel' & keves
Shlamim - par (bull)	Shlamim - 'shor' & 'ayil'

AHARON:	*C* Chatat - 'egel'
(no korban)	Olah - 'ayil'

*A) On 'Yom ha'Shmini' the Nation adds a korban 'chatat'.
*B) On 'Yom ha'Shmini' an 'egel' is offered instead of a 'par'.)
*C) On 'Yom ha'Shmini' Aharon is required to bring an extra korban.

These differences can be understood in light of "chet ha'egel". We will now explain each letter.

A) As the Nation had sinned, they must now offer a 'chatat'.

B) This minor change from 'par' to an 'egel' reflects their sin.

C) As Aharon had sinned, he must bring a 'chatat & olah'.

The significance of this "egel l'chatat" is accented by comparing this korban to the 'chatat & olah' of the 'miluim':

'7 day miluim' - "PAR l'chatat v'ayil l'olah"

"Yom ha'Shmini" - "EGEL l'chatat v'ayil l'olah"

There is only one minor change - the 'egel' (a calf - baby bull) replaces the 'par' (adult bull). Whenever the kohen gadol is required to bring a chatat, it is always a 'par' (see 4:3). On this special day his standard korban is changed to an 'egel', reflecting his atonement for Chet ha'egel.

The nation was also commanded to bring a 'chatat'. If indeed this 'chatat' was in atonement for chet ha'egel, it too should have been an 'egel'. Why was this korban a 'seir'?

The reason is actually quite simple. Whenever the NATION brings a 'chatat' it can only be a 'seir' - a goat. (See parshat ha'musafim bamidbar chps.28-29/ each korban musaf is always a "seir izim l'chatat"). Therefore, the Nation must bring a chatat because of Chet ha'egel, however the animal must be a 'seir'.

The case of Aharon is different. The standard korban chatat of the Kohen Gadol is a 'par' (vayikra 4:3). Therefore, the change from a 'par' to an 'egel' is permitted, as an 'egel' is simply a baby 'par'.

A very similar change from 'par' to 'egel' does take place in the Nation's korban 'olah'. At Har Sinai the nation brought a 'par' as an 'olah'. Now, on 'Yom ha'Shmini' they bring an 'egel' instead of the standard 'par'. Recall that an olah can also be offered in atonement for a sin when one is not obligated to bring a chatat.

The second animal of the Nation's korban 'olah' is a lamb. It is the standard 'olah' of every "korban tzibur" offered in the Mishkan.

The korban 'shlamim' is a 'shor & ayil'. At Har Sinai, the shlamim were also 'parim'. ('par' and 'shor' are two names for the same animal - a bull). Due to the nature of the korban shlamim (a peace offering), it would not be proper to offer a 'reminder' of chet ha'egel. This korban relates only to the 'hitgalut' aspect of this ceremony.

The second animal of the korban shlamim is an 'ayil' (ram). One could suggest that this korban is a reminder of 'akeidat yitzchak', a cornerstone in the development of our covenantal relationship with Hashem.

PARSHAT TAZRIA / METZORA

Anyone who understands the opening pasuk of Parshat Acharei Mot immediately realizes that this entire Parsha belongs in Parshat Shmini! Why then do Parshiot Tazria/Metzora 'interrupt' this logical sequence?

In case this sounds a bit complicated, don't worry; we'll begin this week's shiur by first explaining this question. Then we'll use its answer to help us arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the structure and theme of Sefer Vayikra.

INTRODUCTION

Recall that the first half of Parshat Shmini included the story of tragic death of Aharon's two sons - Nadav & Avihu (see 10:1-9). Recall as well that Parshat ACHAREI MOT (several chapters later) opens with God's commandment to Moshe & Aharon in the aftermath of that event:

"And God spoke to Moshe and Aharon AFTER THE DEATH of the two sons of Aharon..." (16:1)

Hence, it would have been more logical for the Torah to include this commandment in Parshat Shmini - immediately after the story of their death. [In other words, Vayikra chapter 16 should follow immediately after chapter 10!]

However, we find instead that chapters 11 thru 15, detailing numerous laws concerning various types of "tumah" [spiritual uncleanness], form an 'interruption' to this logical flow.

To explain why, Part One of our shiur will explore the thematic relationship between these laws of "tumah" and the story of Nadav & Avinu's death. In Part Two, we will build an outline that will summarize these laws of "tumah" that will help us appreciate their detail.

PART ONE - WHAT DID NADAV & AVIHU DO WRONG?

As you are probably aware, there are numerous opinions concerning what Nadav & Avihu did wrong. The reason for this difference of opinions is simple; the Torah only tells us WHAT they did, but does not explain WHY they were punished. Therefore, each commentator looks for a clue either within that pasuk (see 10:1) or in the 'neighboring' psukim in search of that reason.

[For example, the word "aish zarah" in 10:1 implies that Nadav & Avihu may have sinned by offering the wrong type of fire. Alternately, the 'parshia' that follows discusses laws that forbid the kohanim to become intoxicated (see 10:8-11), thus implying that they may have been drunk. (See Rashi, Ramban, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Chizkuni, etc.) In fact, each commentary on this pasuk is so convincing that it is truly hard to choose between them.]

However, in contrast to that discussion concerning what specifically Nadav & Avihu did wrong (and why), our shiur will focus instead on the more general connection between this incident and the overall structure (and theme) of Sefer Vayikra.

FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS

Even though the Torah does not tell us specifically WHY Nadav & Avihu were punished, the pasuk that describes their sin does provide us with a very general explanation:

"va'yikru aish zara - ASHER LO TZIVAH otam" - and they offered a 'foreign fire' that GOD HAD NOT COMMANDED THEM (see 10:1)

However, finding this phrase "asher lo tzivah otam" should not surprise us. In relation to the construction of the Mishkan, we found this phrase repeated numerous times in our study of Parshiot Vayakhel & Pekudei.

[To refresh your memory, just note how "ka'asher tzivah Hashem et Moshe" [As God has commanded Moshe] concludes just about every "parshia" in Parshat Pekudei. See not only 35:29; 36:1; & 36:5 but also 39:1,5,7,21,26,29,31,32,42,43 & 40:16,19,21,23,25,27,29,32!]

] Furthermore, this phrase first appeared at the very introduction of the Mishkan unit that began in Parshat Vayakhel:

"And Moshe said to the entire congregation of Israel [EYDAH] ZEH HA'DAVAR - ASHER TZIVAH HASHEM - This is what GOD HAS COMMANDED saying..."
(see 35:1,4, see also 35:1)

Finally, thus far in Sefer Vayikra we have found this same phrase when the Torah describes the story of the Mishkan's dedication. First of all, in the the seven day "mili'ut" ceremony:

"And Moshe said to the entire EYDAH [gathered at the Ohel Moed/8:3] - ZEH HA'DAVAR - This is what GOD HAS COMMANDED to do..." (Vayikra 8:4-5, see also 8:9,13,17,21,36.)

And in Moshe Rabeinu's opening explanation of the special korbanot that were to be offered on Yom ha'Shmini:

"And Moshe said: ZEH HA'DAVAR - THIS is what GOD HAS COMMANDED that you do [in order] that His KAVOD [Glory] can appear upon you [once again]..." (9:6, see also 9:1-5)

Carefully note how Moshe declares this statement in front of the entire "eydah" [congregation] that has gathered to watch this ceremony. [See 9:5! Note also in 9:3-4 that Moshe explains to the people that these korbanot will 'bring back' the "shchinah".]

In fact, when you review chapter 9, note how the Torah concludes each stage of this special ceremony with this same phrase. [See 9:5,6,7,10,21.]

Therefore, when the Torah uses a very similar phrase to describe the sin of Nadav & Avihu on that day - "va'yikru aish zara - ASHER LO TZIVAH otam" (see 10:1), we should expect to find a thematic connection between that sin and this phrase.

To find that connection, we must consider the reason why the Torah uses this phrase so often in its details of the Mishkan's construction.

EMPHASIZING A CRITICAL POINT

Recall that Nadav & Avihu's sin took place on the 'eighth day'. Earlier on that day (as the ceremony was about to begin) Moshe had gathered the entire nation to explain the PRECISE details of how the korbanot would be offered on that day.

[Note again, the key phrase: "zeh ha'davar asher tzivah Hashem..." see 9:4-6.] In fact, Moshe made two very similar remarks before the entire nation before the Mishkan's original construction (Shmot 35:1,4), and before the seven day MILUIM ceremony (see Vayikra 8:1).

Why must Moshe, prior to offering these special korbanot, first explain the details of these procedures to the entire congregation who have gathered to watch?

The Torah appears to be sending a very strong message in regard to the Mishkan. God demands that man must act precisely in accordance to His command - without changing even a minute detail.

With this background, we can better understand why Nadav & Avihu are punished. On the day of its public dedication - on Yom ha'Shmini - they decide (on their own) to offer KTORET. Note the Torah's description of their sin:

"And Nadav & Avi each took their firepan, put in it fire and added KTORET, and they brought an alien fire in front of God which He HAD NOT COMMANDED THEM ['asher lo tzivah']"

Their fire is considered "aish zarah" [alien] simply because God 'did not command them' to offer it. [Note the special emphasis upon the word "lo" according to the "taamei mikra" (cantillation). See also commentary of Chizkuni on 10:1.]

Nadav & Avihu may have had the purest intentions, but they made one critical mistake - they did not act according to the precise protocol that God had prescribed for that day. Considering that the entire EYDAH gathered at the Ohel Moed recognize that Nadav & Avihu have strayed from protocol, they must be punished; for the lesson of that day was exactly this point - that in the Mishkan man must meticulously follow every detail of God's command.

[Note, this interpretation does not negate any of the other opinions which suggest that Nadav & Avihu had done something else wrong [such as drinking or disrespect of Moshe, etc.]. It simply allows us to understand the severity their punishment EVEN if they had done nothing 'wrong' at all (other than doing something that God had not commanded). See also commentary of Rashbam on 10:1 in this regard.]

From a thematic perspective, their punishment under these circumstances is quite understandable. Recall the theological dilemma created by a MISHKAN - a physical representation (or symbol) of a transcendental God. Once a physical object is used to represent God, the danger exists that man may treat that object [and then possibly another object] as a god itself. On the other hand, without a physical representation of any sort, it becomes difficult for man to develop any sort of relationship with God. Therefore, God allows a Mishkan - a symbol of His Presence - but at the same time, He must emphasize that He can only be worshiped according to the precise manner "as God had commanded Moshe".

[See also Devarim 4:9-24 for the Torah's discussion of a similar fear that man may choose his own object to represent God [a "tavnit..." / compare Shmot 25:8-9 "v'akmal"].]

THE PROBLEM OF 'GOOD INTENTIONS'

This specific problem of 'following God's command' in relation to the Mishkan takes on extra meaning on Yom ha'Shmini.

Recall our explanation of Aharon's sincere intentions at the incident of "chet ha'egel", i.e. he wanted to provide Bnei Yisrael with a physical symbol of God, which they could worship. [See previous shiur on Ki-tisa.] Despite Aharon's good intentions, his actions led to a disaster. The sin of "chet ha'egel" caused KAVOD HASHEM [God's Glory (= "shchina")], which had appeared to Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai, to be taken away (see Shmot 33:1-7).

Due to Moshe's intervention, God finally allowed His SHCHINA to return to the MISHKAN that Bnei Yisrael had built. But when Nadav & Avihu make a mistake (similar to Aharon's sin at chet ha'egel) on the very day of the Mishkan's dedication, they must be punished immediately.

[Not only can this explain why they are so severely punished, it may also help us understand their father's reaction of: "va'YIDOM Aharon" [and Aharon stood silent] (see 10:3).]

Finally, this interpretation can help us understand Moshe's statement to Aharon: "This is what God had spoken -B'KROVEI E'KADESH..." (see 10:3). Recall the parallel that we have discussed many times between Har Sinai and the Mishkan. At Har Sinai, Bnei Yisrael AND the Kohanim were forewarned:

"And God told Moshe: Go down and WARN the people that they must not break through [the barrier surrounding] Har Sinai, lest they gaze at Hashem and perish. The KOHANIM also, who COME NEAR HASHEM, must sanctify themselves ('yitkadashu' - compare "b'krovei akadesh"/10:3), lest God punish them." (Shmot 19:21)

NADAV & AVIHU's PUNISHMENT

As this inaugural ceremony parallels the events of Har Sinai, God's original warning concerning approaching Har Sinai, even for the KOHANIM, now applies to the Mishkan as well. Therefore, extra caution is necessary, no matter how good one's intentions may be.

BACK TO SEFER VAYIKRA

Now we can return to our original question. In Sefer Vayikra, the story of the sin of Nadav & Avihu (chapter 10) introduces an entire set of laws that discuss improper entry into the Mishkan (chapters 11-15). Then, immediately after this tragic event, the Sefer discusses the various laws of "tumah v'tahara", which regulate who is permitted and who is forbidden to enter the Mishkan. Only after the completion of this section discussing who can enter the Mishkan, does Sefer Vayikra return (in chapter 16) to God's command to Aharon concerning how he himself can properly enter the holiest sanctum of the Mikdash (on Yom Kippur).

In Part Two, we discuss the content of this special unit of mitzvot from chapter 11-15.

PART II

WHO CAN ENTER THE MISHKAN / TUMAH & TAHARA

INTRODUCTION

We often find ourselves lost in the maze of complicated laws concerning "tumah" and "tahara" which the Torah details in Parshiot TAZRIA & METZORA. Even though it is not easy to understand the reasoning for these laws, the internal structure of these Parshiot is quite easy to follow.

In Part II, we outline the flow of parshiot from Parshat Shmini through Metzora and attempt to explain why they are located specifically in this section of Sefer Vayikra.

THE UNIT

As the following table shows, each of these five chapters deals with a topic related in one form or manner to "tumah" (spiritual uncleanness).

CHAPTER "TUMAH" CAUSED BY:

- 11 eating or touching dead animals
- 12 the birth of a child
- 13 a "tzaraat" on a person's skin or garment
- 14 a "tzaraat" in a house
- 15 various emissions from the human body

Not only do these parshiot discuss how one contracts these various types of TUMAH, they also explain how one can cleanse himself from these TUMOT, i.e. how he becomes TAHOR. For the simplest type of TUMAH, one need only wash his clothing and wait until sundown (see 11:27-28,32,40). For more severe types of TUMAH, to become TAHOR one must first wait seven days and then bring a set of special korbanot.

This entire unit follows a very logical progression. It begins with the least severe type of TUMAH, known as "tumah erev" - one day TUMAH (lit. until the evening), and then continues with the more severe type of TUMAH, known as "tumah shiva", seven day TUMAH. Within each category, the Torah first explains how one contracts each type of TUMAH, then it explains the how he becomes TAHOR from it.

The following OUTLINE summarizes this structure. Note how each section of the outline concludes with a pasuk that begins with "zot torat...":

VAYIKRA - CHAPTERS 11 -> 15

- I. ONE DAY TUMAH - 11:1-47 / "v'tamey ad ha'erev"
 - [known as "tumat erev" (or "tumah kala")]
 - Person is TAMEY until nightfall/ see 11:24,25,27,31,32,39 because he ate, touched, or carried the dead carcass of:
 - A. (11:1-28) forbidden animals and fowl
 - B. (29-38) one of the eight "shrotzim" (swarming creatures)
 - C. (39-40) permitted animals that died without "shchita"

D. (41-43) other creeping or swarming creatures.

TAHARA for the above - washing one's clothes/ 11:28,32,40]

FINALE psukim (11:44-47)

[See similar structure in TAZRIA & METZORA]

II. SEVEN DAY TUMAH - 12:1-15:33 ("tumah chamurah")

A. TUMAT YOLEDET - a mother who gave birth (12:1-8)

- 1. for a boy : 7+33=40
- 2. for a girl : 14+66=80

TAHARA - korban chatat & olah

...ZOT TORAT HA'YOLEDET etc.

B. TZARAAT HA'ADAM

TUMAH / based on inspection by the kohen

- 1. on one's body / 13:1-46
- 2. on one's "beged" (garment) /13:47-59

TAHARA / 14:1-32

- 1. special sprinkling, then count 7 days
- 2. special korban on eighth day

...ZOT TORAT ASHER BO NEGA TZARAAT etc.

C. TZARAAT HA'BAYIT / 14:33-53

TUMAH / based on inspection by kohen

- 1. the stones of the house itself (14:33-45)
- 2. secondary "tumah" (14:46-47) for one who:
 - a. enters the house
 - b. sleeps in the house
 - c. eats in the house

TAHARA - a special sprinkling on the house (14:48-53)

summary psukim for all types of TZARAAT (14:54-57)

...ZOT HA'TORAH L'CHOL NEGA HA'TZRAAT

... ZOT TORAT HA'TZRAAT.

D. EMISSIONS FROM THE BODY (chapter 15)

1. MALE - TUMAT ZAV - an abnormal emission of "zera"

- a. he himself (15:1-4) - 7 days
- b. secondary "tumah" / 1 day (15:5-12)

for one who either touches what the ZAV is sitting on, or sits on an item that the ZAV sits, and other misc. cases.

TAHARA (15:13-15)

- waiting 7 days, then washing with "mayim chayim"
- on 8th day a special korban

2. MALE - TUMAT KERI - a normal emission (15:16-18)

- one day "tumah" (until evening)
- requires washing clothing.

3. FEMALE - TUMAT NIDA - a normal flow (15:19-24)

- a. she herself - seven days
- b. secondary "tumah" - one day

for person or items that she touches

4. FEMALE - TUMAT ZAVA - an abnormal flow (15:25-30)

- a. she herself and what she sits on - 7 days
- b. secondary "tumah" for someone who touches her or something which she is sitting on.

TAHARA -

- waiting seven days...

on 8th day a special korban

A FINALE and summary psukim (15:31-33)

...ZOT TORAT HA'ZAV etc.

ABOUT THE OUTLINE

I recommend that you review this outline as you study the Parsha. Note that even though the details are very complicated, the overall structure is actually quite simple.

Note also how the Torah summarizes each section with a phrase beginning with ZOT TORAT... - this is the procedure (or ritual) for... [See the previous shiur on Parshat Tzav/Parah in which we discussed the meaning of the word TORAH in Sefer Vayikra.] The repetition of key phrases such as these is often helpful towards identifying the internal structure of parshiot in Chumash.

Our division of the outline into TWO sections, ONE-DAY tumah and SEVEN-DAY tumah may at first appear to be a bit misleading

for we also find many cases of one day tumah in the second section. However, the cases of one-day TUMAH in the second section are quite different for they are CAUSED by a person who had first become TAMEY for seven days. Therefore, we have defined them as 'secondary' TUMAH in that section.

[TUMAT KERI (15:16-18) may be another exception since it is an independent one-day TUMAH, however it could be considered a sub-category within the overall framework of TUMAT ZAV.]

[See also further iyun section for a discussion why the one-day TUMAH section includes KASHRUT laws.]

WHY THE INTERRUPTION?

Now that we have established that chapters 11->15 form a distinct unit, which discusses the laws of TUMAH & TAHARA; we can return to our original question - Why does this unit interrupt the natural flow from Parshat Shmini (chapter 10) to Parshat Acharei Mot (chapter 16)?

The concluding psukim of this unit can provide us with a possible explanation.

As we have noted in our outline, this entire unit contains an important FINALE pasuk:

"V'HIZARTEM ET BNEI YISRAEL M'TUMATAM... And you shall put Bnei Yisrael on guard [JPS - see further iyun regarding translation of "vhizartem"] against their TUMAH, LEST THEY DIE through their TUMAH by defiling My MISHKAN which is among them." (see 15:31)

This pasuk connects the laws of TUMAH & TAHARA to the laws of the Mishkan. Bnei Yisrael must be careful that should they become TAMEY, they must not ENTER the Mishkan. In fact, the primary consequence for one who has become TAMEY is the prohibition that he cannot enter the MIKDASH complex. There is no prohibition against becoming TAMEY, rather only a prohibition against entering the Mishkan should he be TAMEY.

Hence, the entire TAHARA process as well is only necessary for one who wishes to enter the Mishkan. If there is no Mishkan, one can remain TAMEY his entire life with no other consequence (see further iyun section).

With this background, we can suggest a common theme for the first 16 chapters of Sefer Vayikra - the ability of Bnei Yisrael to enter the Mishkan, to come closer to God.

Let's explain:

The first section of Sefer Vayikra, chapters 1->7, explains HOW and WHEN the individual can bring a korban and HOW they are offered by the kohen. The next section, chapters 8->10, records the special Mishkan dedication ceremony, which prepared Bnei Yisrael and the Kohanim for using and working in the Mishkan. As this ceremony concluded with the death of Nadav & Avihu for improper entry into the Mishkan (when offering the "ktoret zara"), Sefer Vayikra continues with an entire set of commandments concerning TUMAH & TAHARA, chapters 11->15, which regulate who can and cannot ENTER THE MISHKAN. This unit ends with laws of Yom Kippur, which describe the procedure of how the "kohen gadol" (high priest) can enter the most sacred domain of the Mishkan - the Kodesh K'doshim.

Even though these laws of TUMAH & TAHARA may have been given to Moshe at an earlier or later time, once again, we find that Sefer Vayikra prefers thematic continuity over chronological order (see shiur on Parshat Tzav). First, the Sefer discusses who cannot enter the Mishkan. Then it explains who can enter its most sacred domain.

ZEHIRUT - BEING CAREFUL

Up until this point, we have discussed the technical aspects of the structure of this unit in Parshiot Shmini, Tazria & Metzora. Is there any significance to these laws of TUMAH & TAHARA today as well?

The simplest explanation is based on our parallel between the Mishkan and Har Sinai. Just as Bnei Yisrael's encounter with God at Har Sinai required special preparation, so too man's encounter with God in the Mishkan. It would not be proper for man just to 'hop on in'

whenever he feels like entering the Mishkan. Instead, each time an individual plans to offer a korban or enter the Mishkan for any other reason, he must prepare himself by making sure not to come in contact with anything which would make him TAMEY. Should for any reason he become TAMEY, he must wash his clothes and wait until the next day. Should he himself contract a major type of TUMAH such as TZARAAT or ZAV, then he must wait at least seven days and undergo a special ritual which will make him TAHOR.

All of these complicated laws cause the man who wishes to visit the Mishkan to be very careful and constantly aware of everything he touches, or carries, etc. during the entire week prior to his visit, thus enhancing his spiritual readiness for entering the Mishkan.

Today, even without a Mishkan, man must still make every effort to find God's Presence, even though it is hidden. Therefore, man's state of constant awareness and caution concerning everything that he says and does remains a primary means by which man can come closer to God, even though no Bet Ha'Mikdash exists.

An important thought to keep in mind as we prepare ourselves during the seven weeks of Sefirat ha'omer in preparation for our commemoration of Ma'amad Har Sinai on Shavuot.

shabbat shalom
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. In relation to the translation of the word "v'hizartem et Bnei Yisrael..." (15:31), see Ibn Ezra. He explains that the word does not stem from "azhara"=warning, but rather from the word "nazir", to separate oneself ["zarut"]. Then "nun" simply falls which is noted by the dagesh in the "zayin". See Ibn Ezra inside!

B. Since this section of chapters 11->15 discuss various laws of TUMAH & TAHARA, one would expect it to include the laws of TUMAT MEYT (caused by touching a dead person). Instead, the Torah records these laws in Parshat Chukat, Bamidbar chapter 19. It appears as though that parsha was 'spliced' from this unit and 'transferred' to Sefer Bamidbar. This parsha is one of many parshiot in Sefer Bamidbar which would appear to 'belong' in Sefer Vayikra instead. Iy'h, we will explain the reason for this in our shiurim on Sefer Bamidbar - "v'akmal".

C. At first glance, the section in our unit which discusses 'one-day' TUMAH (chapter 11) appears to be discussing "kashrut" (dietary laws) more than TUMAH, for it details which animals are permitted or forbidden to be eaten. However, the dietary laws which are mentioned here because one becomes TAMEY should he eat the meat of an animal which is TAMEY.

To prove this, simply compare this parsha to the dietary laws in Parshat Re'ay (see Dvarim 14:1-21). There we find only dietary laws and not laws of TUMAH & TAHARA. Therefore, laws such as "basar v'chalav" are mentioned in that parsha, while the laws of TUMAH are not!

D. These laws which discuss who can and cannot enter the Mikdash are sometimes referred to as HILCHOT BIYAT MIKDASH (see Rambam Sefer Avodah). Obviously, these laws apply only when a Mikdash exists, as there is no other consequence of 'becoming tamey' other than limited entry to areas containing shchinah.

Nonetheless, there are several circumstances when it is still necessary to know these laws. For example, entering HAR HA'BAYIT even when there is not Mikdash requires that one not be TAMEY. These laws also relate to eating TRUMOT & MAASROT.

E. See 11:44-45

"...v'hitkadishem, v'yehiyitem KDOSHIM, ki KADOSH ani"
"v'lo t'TAMU et nafshoteichem..."
"ki ani Hashem ha'maale etchem m'eretz mitzrayim,
l'hiyot l'chem l'Elokim, v'heyitem KDOSHIM..."
"... l'havdil bein ha'tamey u'bein ha'tahor..."

This finale of the section explaining 'one-day' TUMAH connects the theme of Sefer Shmot, that Hashem took us out Egypt in order that we become His nation, to the laws of "tumah & tahara". To become God's nation, we must be like Him. Just as He is "kadosh" (set aside, different), we must also be "kadosh".

Man's spirituality begins with his recognition that he is different than animal. Although man and animal are similar in many ways, man must realize that he was set aside by God for a higher purpose. God blessed man with special qualities in order that he fulfill that purpose. [See Rambam in Moreh Nvuchim I.1 regarding the definition of *tzelem elokim*. It is not by coincidence that the Rambam begins Moreh Nvuchim with this concept.]

These laws of "tumat ochlim" teach Am Yisrael that they must differentiate between man and animal, and between different types of animals. By doing so, man will learn to differentiate between divine and mundane, between "tamey & tahor", and finally between good and bad, right and wrong etc.

D. In previous shiurim, we explained how the cycles of seven found in Chumash relate to our need to recognize the hand of God behind nature. Why do you think that we also find cycles of seven in the laws of TZARAAT, ZAV, and ZAVA that appear to be the exact opposite, that is abnormalities in nature?

Parshat Shemini: What is Holiness?

By Rabbi Eitan Mayer

Note: Our parsha records the tragic deaths of Nadav and Avihu, sons of Aharon. We focused on that event in our discussion of Parashat Tetzaveh in Sefer Shemot, where we analyzed the proper role and orientation of the kohen (priest) toward his holy task, and in particular how Nadav's and Avihu's act violated that conception of priestly function. That shiur is available on the web at <http://victorian.fortunecity.com/brutalist/608>, the Parsha Themes archive.

TERMINOLOGY AND SEFER VAYIKRA:

Whenever we come across special terminology in the Torah, it is always our first job to re-examine our assumptions about its meaning. Are we just plugging in the understanding we've held since childhood, or are we willing to rethink our assumptions -- and perhaps reject ideas we have held for a long time? Take our discussion of the term "korban hattat," for example: last shiur discussed the word "hattat" and what it means in Sefer VaYikra in particular. We began with the popular assumption that "hattat" means "sin," and so a "korban hattat" would be a "sin-offering," a korban brought to expiate sin. But we emerged with a very different conclusion: "hattat" in this context means to "clean up" or "purge"; a korban hattat is therefore not a "sin-offering," but a "cleansing offering."

This helped us solve some basic problems:

1) If the korban hattat is indeed a "sin-offering," and its function is to expiate the sin of the person or people who offer it, why does the Torah demand a korban hattat from people who have committed no apparent sin (i.e., every woman who gives birth [yoledet], every healed metzora [sufferer of the biblical skin disease "tzara'at"], every healed zav and zava [people who have experienced irregular genital emissions], and several other cases)? In all of these cases, a serious form of tum'ah, ritual impurity, is present, but there is no sin to forgive -- so why an expiatory sacrifice? In addition, one who becomes tamei (impure) by contact with a human corpse must be sprinkled with the ashes of the para aduma, the red cow, as part of the purification process; but since there is no sin in becoming tamei in the first place, why does the Torah refer to the para aduma as a "hattat"?

If, however, we understand "hattat" to mean "cleaning up impurity," it is clear why a hattat is necessary in each of these impurity-inducing cases.

2) What is the actual mechanism of the korban hattat in the Mishkan and the Beit Ha-Mikdash? *How* does it "take care of" or expiate the averot (sins) we have committed? We began with the assumption that the korban hattat is something like a gift to appease Hashem so that He will forgive us for the avera, but we ended with the idea that the hattat is less a gift than it is a "mopping up" of the Mikdash. We examined indications later in Sefer VaYikra that our averot impact on ourselves and environment: if we behave immorally, we defile not only ourselves, but Eretz Yisrael itself, and since Eretz Yisrael cannot tolerate impurity, it will eventually "vomit us out" (as the Torah so graphically puts it). Sefer VaYikra teaches that our averot also destroy the spiritual environment in the Mikdash, making it tamei; this is why, once a year, Yom Kippur provides us with an opportunity to purge ("hattat") not only ourselves, but also the Mikdash, of all the accumulated impurities our averot have produced.

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

Terminology appears all over the Torah, but defining it is especially critical in Sefer VaYikra, where we constantly encounter terms for concepts and actions outside of the realm of everyday life. One term which comes up all the time, especially in Sefer VaYikra, is the word "k-d-sh," usually translated "holy."

"K-d-sh" takes many forms in Tanakh (the Bible). Some examples:

- 1) "Kedusha," "holiness" (noun)
- 2) "Kadosh," "holy" (adjective)
- 3) "Kidesh," "(he) sanctified" (third person singular past tense verb)
- 4) "Kiddush," "a sanctification" (e.g., "Kiddush Hashem," "kiddush" on Friday night)

"K-d-sh" appears in different forms almost 900 times in Tanakh, making it a fairly common word. Not only that, but it is particularly common in Sefer VaYikra, appearing about 150 times -- more than in any other Humash. Not only is "k-d-sh" very common in Sefer VaYikra, it is also very important.

One place where Sefer VaYikra highlights kedusha is Perek 11 (part of our parsha), which focuses on which creatures may be eaten and which can transmit tum'a (impurity) to people. After delivering instructions about which creatures are permitted to us and which transmit tum'a, the Torah calls on us to keep these mitzvot in order that we become "kadosh."

Many of us are probably familiar with many different contexts which invoke the idea of kedusha, although we may not normally make explicit connections between them. In order to properly understand the real meaning of all of the mitzvot which the Torah connects with "k-d-sh," and, moreover, to understand what the Torah is really asking of us when it calls us to become "kadosh" (as Sefer VaYikra does at several opportunities), we need to understand what "k-d-sh" really means. One way of doing this is to take a look at what the Torah tells us is kadosh, or can become kadosh, and also at how kedusha impacts on these contexts. First, we will move through the Torah, listing some major loci of kedusha. Once we have some idea of where to find kedusha, we will discuss what "kedusha" might mean.

Kedusha is to be found, according to the Torah, in what I have found convenient to split into five major categories:

- 1) Time
- 2) Space
- 3) Objects (animate and inanimate)
- 4) People
- 5) Hashem

KEDUSHA IN TIME:

- 1) The very first time kedusha appears in the Torah, it refers to time: Shabbat. Hashem completes the creation of the world after six days and then rests; He is "me-kadesh" the Shabbat. Later on, when Bnei Yisrael appear in the world, they are told that they must do the same thing: "Zakhor et yom ha-Shabbat le-kadsho" -- "Remember the Sabbath, to sanctify it."
- 2) Other examples of holy time are also well known: the Mo'adim (festivals), i.e., Pesah, Shavuot, Succot, Rosh Ha-Shana, and Yom Kippur are described by the Torah as "holy."

KEDUSHA IN SPACE:

- 1) The first space that the Torah describes as kadosh is Har Sinai: Moshe the shepherd sees the (non)-burning bush (situated at Sinai), approaches it, and is told to remove his shoes because "the ground you are standing on is 'kodesh' ground." This kedusha comes to full expression when the nation emerges from Egypt and arrives at Sinai to receive the Torah. At that time, Hashem commands the people to stay off of the mountain because it is so 'kadosh.' Even the kohanim (priests), who might consider themselves holy enough to be allowed on the mountain, are specifically prohibited from ascending because of the great kedusha of the mountain.
- 2) The space most often described by the Torah as kadosh is, of course, the "Mikdash" (Temple), which means "sanctum," after all. The essence of the Mikdash is kedusha.
- 3) One other space which the Torah describes as kadosh is the camp of Bnei Yisrael. Hashem commands that we keep the camp 'kadosh.' This is accomplished by making sure that high standards of dignified and moral behavior are upheld in the camp.

KEDUSHA IN OBJECTS (animate and inanimate):

A) Animals:

- 1) Bekhor: first-born animals are considered holy as a result of Hashem's killing the Egyptian firstborn and saving the firstborn of Bnei Yisrael.
- 2) Korbanot: in many places in the Torah, animals which are set aside and designated to become korbanot (sacrificial offerings) are called "kodashim." This term is used by Hazal as the name for one of the six major sections of the Mishnaic corpus, the section which deals with things designated to various kadosh purposes.

B) Inanimate objects:

- 1) Clothing of the kohanim: the "bigdei kehuna" are constantly referred to by the Torah as the "bigdei kodesh."
- 2) Klei ha-Mikdash: the "furniture" of the Mishkan/Mikdash is often referred to as kadosh; even today, we call the Aron in our shuls the "aron ha-kodesh." Also, during the inauguration ceremony for the Mishkan, Moshe is instructed to sanctify ("le-kadesh") all of the furniture through different rituals, including anointing the kelim with the special anointing oil and sprinkling blood on the kelim from special inaugural korbanot.

KEDUSHA IN PEOPLE:

- 1) Bekhor: Hashem tells Bnei Yisrael on several occasions that all firstborn sons are considered "kadosh" as a result of His having killed all of the firstborn of Egypt and saved the Jewish firstborn. In practice, this means that for all generations, each firstborn son has a special kedusha which remains with him and requires a pidyon ha-ben ("redemption of the son") to be done. The baby boy is brought to the kohen, since the kohen represents Hashem, and money is given to the kohen in order to 'redeem' the baby boy. The money is not to buy the baby, of course, it is to remove the kedusha of the baby and transfer it to the money, which the kohen can then use. (Note that halakha holds that the baby does not actually have kedushat ha-guf prior to the pidyon.)

Another aspect of the kedusha of the firstborn is their (short-lived) selection as priests. Originally, the firstborn son of each family was designated to serve Hashem as a priest. This function, however, was transferred to the Leviyim in a process described in Sefer BeMidbar. This process removed the kedusha from the firstborn and transferred it to the Leviyim.

- 2) Kohanim: In many places in the Torah, kohanim are identified as kadosh. In this week's parasha in particular, Moshe is commanded by Hashem to consecrate Aharon and his sons to be kohanim: "kadesho le-khahano li," "sanctify him to serve Me."

In addition, when the Torah tells us later in Sefer VaYikra that a kohen is forbidden to come into contact with a human corpse (with the exception of immediate relatives, for a non kohen-gadol), the Torah connects this prohibition with the fact that the kohen is kadosh. And when the Torah tells us that a kohen may not marry certain women (divorced women, women whose sexual relationships have been transitory and non-marital, and others), the Torah explains this restriction by repeating that the kohen is 'kadosh.' His kedusha apparently prevents his marrying certain women.

- 3) Bnei Yisrael: The Torah associates kedusha not only with particular members of Bnei Yisrael, but with the nation as a whole. Before the Torah is given, Hashem tells the people that His goal for them is that they become a "mamleket kohanim ve-goy kadosh" -- we are to be a 'kadosh' nation to Hashem, a nation of kohanim to Hashem. A similar theme is picked up by Sefer Devarim, which repeats several times that Hashem chose us as His "am segula," treasured nation, His "am kadosh." (Shemot focuses more on the challenge to us to become holy, whilst Devarim focuses on our being dedicated by Hashem to His service).

In our parasha, the Torah gives us the rules about which animals we may eat and which not, and then explains this set of laws with the charge to us to become holy. Apparently, kashrut has something significant to do with holiness. Hashem's command to us to be holy appears again -- probably its most famous appearance in all of the Torah -- in Parashat Kedoshim. Shortly after this command, the Torah gives us the laws detailing which sexual unions are prohibited. This section ends with a charge to us to keep these laws and thereby be kadosh. Apparently, maintaining sexual boundaries, too, has something important to do with achieving kedusha.

HASHEM'S HOLINESS:

Hashem is described by the Torah several times as kadosh. These appearances split into two categories:

- 1) Places where the Torah describes Hashem Himself as kadosh. [Note that in almost all of the places where Hashem describes Himself as holy, this is connected to the holiness of Bnei Yisrael through imitatio Dei; in other words, Hashem is usually saying something like, "Be holy because I, your God, am holy."]
- 2) Places where Hashem demands that people sanctify Him. This should be familiar to us as the concept of "kiddush Hashem." This means somehow adding to the glory of Hashem's reputation among people. In our parasha, when Nadav and Avihu are killed when they bring an unbidden ketoret (incense) offering before Hashem, Moshe tells Aharon that Hashem has told him, "bi-krovai e-kadash" -- "I am made kadosh through those closest to me," or "I will preserve the kedusha of my immediate surroundings." While this pasuk (verse) remains enigmatic, it does communicate clearly that in some sense, Hashem's kedusha has been reinforced, protected, or enhanced by the incident which has just occurred.

A similar use of "kedusha" appears when Moshe hits the rock to which Hashem has commanded him to speak. Hashem punishes Moshe for not sanctifying Him before all of the people; speaking to the rock would have been more impressive, but Moshe ruins this opportunity and is therefore denied the opportunity to enter Eretz Yisrael.

HOLINESS AS A "SUBSTANCE":

What does "k-d-sh" mean? One possibility is the English word "holy"; something "holy" has an inhering (but not necessarily *inherent*) quality of "holiness." Something "holy" is different than other things not just because the holy thing has been designated verbally or ceremonially for a particular purpose, and not just because there are different rules for how we are to behave with regard to the holy object, but is different in its very spiritual essence: it contains "kedusha," "holiness," a sort of spiritual-mystical-metaphysical substance or energy, so to speak, just as something which is "acidic" is full of acid and something which is "hot" is full of a certain type of energy.

Of course, this view of kedusha does not really provide us with a rationale for our pursuit of kedusha; instead, it posits the existence of an essence called "holiness" which can inhere in various objects, and toward which we are enjoined to aspire. It is not clear what relationship kedusha, in this conception, has with "goodness" or "rightness," or even "religiosity," for that matter. We are commanded to become holy, as we have seen, but according to this view, kedusha is not something of which we can make sense; it just exists -- in the spiritual universe -- as gravity and friction and radioactivity exist in the physical universe. We can certainly get a sense of the "mechanics" of kedusha, like where it exists, how it can be used, how we must relate to things which are "kadosh," etc., the same way we have a sense of the mechanics of gravity, like where it exists, how it can be used, and how we must behave given the fact that gravity is a reality. But we do not connect gravity with morality or goodness or religion; it is just a reality.

On the other hand, the Torah clearly connects kedusha with obedience to Hashem, the mitzvot, Hashem himself, and even makes the achievement of self-sanctification a primary goal. But it is hard to understand why. (Not being a mystic, I can't offer any kabbalistic conceptions of kedusha; I imagine kabbala has a lot to say about kedusha as an inhering essence.)

KEDUSHA AS A MEANS:

We now move to a second possible definition of kedusha: "Separated from other things to be dedicated to a higher purpose." In this perspective, kedusha is not the goal in itself, it is only a means; it is not an essence or spiritual "stuff" with which we are to fill ourselves, it is a way of behaving toward things that have been dedicated, formally or informally, to a higher purpose. Of course, that means that when the Torah tells us to be holy, it is not supplying us with an end which represents a significant goal in its own right, it is instead providing us with a strategy to achieve the real goals of our mission as Jews.

But what are the "real goals" of our mission, and how is kedusha a means to achieving them, instead of an essential goal in itself? In order to answer this question, we need to look at the manifestations of kedusha which we discussed above. In pointing to various significant loci of kedusha, we have given kedusha an address, so to speak. But who lives at each of these addresses -- in other words, what values or goals are communicated or achieved by these loci of kedusha? How does kedusha enhance these mitzvot and allow their core purpose to be achieved?

KEDUSHA IN TIME:

As we discussed above, Shabbat, Yom Kippur, Rosh Ha-Shana, Pesah, Shavuot, and Succot are described by the Torah as holy times. How does the kedusha of these days play out? Even a quick look at the descriptions of Shabbat and the Mo'adim in the Torah makes clear that kedusha is intimately connected with one very specific aspect of these days: the issur melakha (prohibition to do creative work):

SHABBAT:

Shemot 16:22-23 --

On the sixth day [Friday], they gathered double bread [of the "manna"], 2 'omers' per person; all the princes of the nation came and told Moshe. He said to them, "It is as Hashem said, 'A rest, a holy rest ["shabbat kodesh"] to Hashem tomorrow'; whatever you need to bake, bake [today], and whatever you need to cook, cook [today]

Moshe connects the fact that Shabbat is "kodesh" with the need to cook everything today because of the issur melakha on Shabbat. The kedusha of Shabbat, in other words, is expressed in the issur melakha. This is expressed more explicitly by the Torah in several other places, some of them quite well known:

Shemot 20:7-9 [Part of the Decalogue]:

"Remember the day of Shabbat, to sanctify it ["le-kadsho"]. <<How do we sanctify Shabbat?>> Six days you shall work, and do all of your labor, but the seventh day is Shabbat to Hashem, your God -- DO NOT DO ANY WORK

Of course, the opposite of "kodesh" is "hol," or "non-holy," sometimes translated as "profane," but misleadingly so, in my opinion, since "profane" has taken on negative connotations, while there is usually nothing wrong with a lack of kedusha; "hol" is a neutral state. "Hulin," for example, is Hazal's term for non-sacred food, i.e., all the food we eat nowadays, when there are no sacrifices. Having said that, it must be noted that there are circumstances where a lack of kedusha is not at all neutral, and is in fact a capital crime. For example, Shabbat carries the death penalty (!) for one who removes its kedusha, one who makes it "hol":

Shemot 31:14 --

Keep the Shabbat, for it is holy ["kadosh"] to you; its profaners ["me-Haleleha," from the word "hol"] shall be executed. <<And then the Torah once again connects the kedusha of Shabbat with the issur melakha:>> For all who do work on it, that soul shall be cut off from the midst of its nation.

[The same pattern of kedusha --> issur melakha is observable in Shemot 35:2 and Devarim 5:12.]

MO'ADIM:

As mentioned above, the Mo'adim are described by the Torah as holy times. Like Shabbat, this holiness is directly connected with a particular aspect which all of the Mo'adim share despite their differences in other matters: the issur melakha. The Torah's term for these days, other than "Mo'adim," is "Mikra'ei kodesh," "Declared times of holiness." Whenever the Torah uses this term, "Mikra'ei kodesh," to describe the Mo'adim, it is *always* followed by the explanation that the kedusha of the mo'ed is manifested in the issur melakha. One of the best places to note this pattern is in VaYikra 23 (see also Shemot 12:16 and BeMidbar 28-29), where Shabbat is also included among the Mo'adim:

VaYikra 23:3 --

Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day is a rest time, a "mikra kodesh": do not do any work

VaYikra 23:7 --

On the first day [of Pesah] is a "mikra kodesh" for you: do not do any work.

VaYikra 23:8 --

. . . on the seventh day [of Pesah] is a "mikra kodesh": do not do any work.

VaYikra 23:21--

. . . [Shavuot is] a "mikra kodesh" for you: do not do any work.

VaYikra 23:24-25 --

[Rosh Ha-Shana is a] "mikra kodesh": do not do any work.

VaYikra 23:35-36 --

On the first day [of Succot] is a "mikra kodesh": do not do any work . . . on the eighth day is a "mikra kodesh" . . . do not do any work.

One exception to the rule that "mikra kodesh" leads right into "do not do any work" is Yom Kippur:

VaYikra 23:27-28 --

. . . The Day of Purification ["Yom Ha-Kippurim"] . . . is a "mikra kodesh" for you: Make yourselves suffer [i.e., fasting, etc.] . . . and do not do any work.

But the truth is that Yom Kippur fits right in: in all of these cases, kedusha means restriction of some sort. On Shabbat, it means an absolute prohibition of work; on Hagim (holidays), a prohibition of most types of work; and on Yom Kippur, a prohibition of work and of enjoyment.

KEDUSHA AND RESTRICTIONS:

What does kedusha have to do with restrictions? Why is it connected in the Torah with all of the restrictions mentioned in the examples above? The answer is that kedusha does not *produce* or *require* restrictions -- it *is* restrictions! "Kedusha" means setting something apart for a higher purpose. The way to set something apart is to prevent the normal from occurring with regard to that thing. The way we set Shabbat apart from the other days -- the way we make it "holy" -- is "six days you shall work . . . but on the seventh day you shall rest." It is not that Shabbat is infused with some mystical "kedusha" substance, it is that we are called to separate this day from the others, and this separation is accomplished by not doing work like we usually do.

But the act of kiddush -- the act of setting something apart for a higher purpose -- is obviously not an end in itself. The purpose of this setting apart is to allow special things to take place. Kedusha, to put it concretely, is a way of making space for important things to happen. It is a strategy to allow opportunities for important goals to be accomplished.

In describing many of the mitzvot, the Torah is quite clear about what these goals are. Let's take Shabbat as an example. First, the requirement to sanctify Shabbat: this "wipes the day clean" by erasing our normal work agenda. By doing this, we have created space for the Torah to direct us to do important things on this day: to remember that Hashem created the world (the theme of Shabbat according to the Decalogue in Sefer Shemot), and to remember that He took us out of Egypt (the theme of Shabbat according to the Decalogue in Sefer Devarim). Kedusha does not create the issur melakha; it *is* the issur melakha. The "end" of Shabbat is to contemplate Hashem's creation and His redemption; the means which makes this end possible is the imposition of kedusha, which, by demanding that we distinguish this day from other days, effectively clears our schedules of work and allows us the opportunity to engage in what Shabbat was created for.

The same is true of the Mo'adim as well. Kedusha clears a space of time by forbidding work; then the particular theme of that particular Mo'ed (not our topic here) can come in and get the attention it deserves. Kedusha is an opportunity-maker. For Yom Kippur in

particular, the specific content of the day -- purification -- requires that more space, and more kinds of space, be cleared than usual. Not only is the work schedule cleared, the pleasure schedule is cleared as well. This is necessary for self-purification and Mikdash-purification to take place. So on Yom Kippur, since the day's theme calls for more setting apart than other holy days, kedusha has a bigger job than usual in clearing the necessary space.

KEDUSHAH IN SPACE:

To put it briefly, sanctifying space also creates opportunities. Dedicating a space to a special purpose means that the normal things cannot be allowed to occur there -- otherwise, in what sense could we call such a space "dedicated"? So when Har Sinai is dedicated to be the place where the revelation of the Torah will occur, it becomes a place where Moshe cannot come with shoes, shod in the normal way; he must show respect for the dedicatedness of the place by removing his shoes. The same is true of the prohibition for anyone to ascend the mountain; its being dedicated means restriction: although people can usually walk wherever they want, they cannot walk here because this place has been chosen for Hashem to appear. Kedusha is not the point, it is a preparatory strategy. It makes space for Hashem to descend. The same is true of the Mishkan, certainly a place whose kedusha restricts access; and the greater the kedusha, the more restricted the access, not because one produces the other, but because they are one and the same.

KEDUSHAH IN OBJECTS:

[I think the point is made. We need not belabor it by demonstrating it in every context in which we mentioned the presence of kedusha. If you are unsure how kedusha-restriction creates opportunities in objects, drop me a line and I will try to explain.]

KEDUSHAH IN PEOPLE:

Along the same lines, kedusha in people does not mean that the people are spiritually different. It simply means that they are separated from others to be dedicated to a special purpose. This is what Hashem is telling us when He calls on us to be holy: not to fill ourselves with "holiness," but to be dedicated! "Kedoshim tihyu" and statements like it found all over the Torah are often connected with Hashem's informing us that He has chosen us from among the nations as His special nation. Now, this does not mean that He has chosen us to fill with "holiness," it means He has chosen us to fulfill the mission for which the entire human experiment was undertaken by Hashem: to mirror Him, to achieve our potential as "images of Hashem," "tzelem Elokim." Hashem frames humanity's mission quite specifically: we are to be creative ("peru u-revu," i.e., procreative) as He is creative, conquer the world and rule it as He rules the universe, and maintain the standards of morality (expressed by Sefer Bereshit as the prohibition to kill animals for food, an idea which is later compromised but which, as we have discussed, is echoed in Sefer VaYikra). This mission is originally commanded to all humans, but later, after humanity shows its fundamental corruption and must be destroyed in the Flood, Hashem focuses His "hopes" on the Avot (forefathers) as the seeds of His new plan. He chooses individuals to found a nation which will achieve the mission as is necessary and help guide the rest of humanity toward the mission as well. Later formulations in the Torah add another dimension: as that special nation, we are to be holy, as Hashem is holy: read, we are to be distinct, other, dedicated to higher standards, just as Hashem is all of these things. We are set aside by Hashem for this higher purpose: "Atem tihyu li mamleket kohanim ve-goy kadosh."

In similar fashion, the kohanim among Bnei Yisrael are more holy than other Jews: they are to be devoted to serving Hashem. They are not inherently, metaphysically, spiritually holier or better than other Jews; they are merely designated to divine service. [No sour grapes here; I am a kohen myself.] The fact that they are set apart for this higher purpose plays out not only in their ability to perform the avoda (Temple service), but also in their being unable to marry women whose status would impinge on the kohen's being dedicated to a higher function. In addition, being set apart to do the avoda means that kohanim cannot come into contact with corpses except under extreme circumstances: the kohen is at all times to be ready to drop everything and serve in the Mikdash. Contracting the severe impurity of a corpse negates the kohen's dedicatedness to Divine service by making this service impossible for him. The Kohen Gadol is even more kadosh -- more dedicated -- than the standard kohen, so he may never contract this impurity, which is fundamentally inimical to his kohen-gadol-hood.

KASHRUT:

Just to briefly mention two other examples of mitzvot closely connected with kedusha: in our parasha, the Torah, with great "fanfare," warns us that eating the prohibited animals is a problem because we are enjoined to be kadosh. Well, what do split hooves, chewing the cud, fins and scales, etc. have to do with holiness?

Perhaps nothing. The kedusha here is, as above, not the ultimate goal of this mitzvah, it is only a description of how the mitzvah functions. It is a set of restrictions: do not eat this, that, or the other thing. We do not refrain from eating these things in order to increase our holiness quotient; instead, the *act* of refraining is the kedusha itself. The Torah restricts these animals in order to make space for important values to be communicated and internalized. What are those values? This the Torah leaves largely unsaid, but the suggestion I find most compelling is that this perek brings together a number of disparate themes. Cloven hooves, chewing cud, fins, scales, are not inherent markers of virtue, they are ways of severely limiting the variety and number of living creatures we are able to kill for food (a value we have seen implicit in Sefer VaYikra and other places; and no, I am not a vegetarian). Many have noted that all of the forbidden birds are predators or carrion eaters; not eating them symbolizes our rejection of their cruel and bloody lifestyle.

SEXUAL CRIMES:

One last mitzvah: the "arayot," the cardinal sexual crimes listed in VaYikra 18 and 20, are repeatedly connected with kedusha. But once again, I would argue that the point is not kedusha, the *restrictions* are kedusha. The point of the restrictions is the protection of important things: the incest and adultery prohibitions protect the structure of the family, and the homosexuality, bestiality, and menstruating-woman prohibitions protect the core value of using sex as a way to create (procreate), not an outlet for just enjoyment (a menstruating woman is, for those who may be unaware, at the point of the cycle where conception is most unlikely).

As always, the perspective in this shiur is only mine (perhaps I should say only one of mine). While I have explored the more rational side of what kedusha might mean, I do not mean to imply that the other options are silly or untrue.

Shabbat Shalom

Parshas Shemini: The Anonymous Sons of Aharon: An Analysis of Vayikra 10

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. TRAGEDY

Our Parasha contains one of the two narratives which break up the flow of legalistic/covenantal material which comprises Sefer Vayikra. Subsequent to being commanded regarding the various offerings to be brought in the Mishkan, God directed Moshe as to the method of inauguration of the Kohanim into their positions as guardians of – and officiants in – the Mishkan. (Chapter 8 – this procedure, including the first seven-day Milu'im process, is known as Kiddush haKohanim).

On the eighth day of the Milu'im, the first day of the first month (Rosh Chodesh "Nisan"), the Mishkan was set to be dedicated and the Kohanim to be fully invested. Chapter 9 details the involvement of Moshe, Aharon and Aharon's sons in that process. The many steps taken, including a sequence of personal and communal offerings brought by Aharon with the assistance of his sons, were intended to enshrine the Shekhinah in the Mishkan (hence the name Mishkan). At the end of Chapter 9, it seems as if that goal has been met: And there came a fire out from before Hashem, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat; which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces.

With this crescendo of excitement and spiritual ecstasy, we fully expect something akin to the great Revelation at Sinai; some more intense experience of God's Presence as felt among the people. It is at this crucial moment, as the nation is bowing, awaiting the full "Hashra'at haSh'khinah" that we are abruptly and tragically pulled from the world of supernal life to immediate and shocking death: And Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon, took each of them his censer, and put fire in it, and put incense on it, and offered strange fire before Hashem, which He commanded them not. And there went out fire from Hashem, and devoured them, and they died before Hashem.

What the Torah tells us is simple: Nadav and Avihu took fire-pans, put fire and incense in each and offered them before God. What the Torah does not tell us is what is wrong with this behavior – and why it carries with it such an immediate and terrifying (while awe-inspiring) death. In order to understand this, we need to see how the narrative unfolds; perhaps the context will be edifying and enlightening.

II. CONSOLATION

We are not sure about the first reaction of Aharon, the man whose greatest day had finally arrived as he began service as the Kohen of Hashem; did he weep? did he continue his worship? This is unclear from the text but we do know Moshe's first words to Aharon, the stricken father:

Then Moshe said to Aharon, This is what Hashem spoke, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come near to Me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aharon held his peace.

What are we to make of these words of Moshe? First of all, when did God ever state biK'rovai Ekadesh ("I will be sanctified in them that come near to Me" – this translation is as poor as any other available one)?

In addition, we might ask what Moshe's motivation was in uttering these words: Is he comforting Aharon? Is he, perhaps, chastising him?

Furthermore, the import of Moshe's words is not at all clear (hence the problem with the translation). Does he mean that God's Presence can only become "enshrined" by the death of one of His chosen? Perhaps he means to say that God being exacting with His chosen ones is a method of generating a Kiddush Hashem; it is certainly not clear what these words mean.

It is plausible that the answers to these questions are mutually dependent – if we understand Moshe's words as being motivated by a desire to comfort his brother, it is possible that he is "interpreting" previously stated words of God and applying them to this situation – and thereby enhancing the stature of Nadav and Avihu in their father's tear-filled eyes. If, on the other hand, Moshe is "paraphrasing" an actual command of God (e.g. such as the boundaries established at Sinai – see Sh'mot 19:23), these words may be less "soothing" in tone and may mean that God became sanctified by virtue of the death of those who tried to come close. Again, an easy resolution to these words is not on our horizon – but we must attempt to decipher them to the best of our abilities.

Finally, how are we to understand Aharon's silence? Again, there are several parts to this question: First of all, was he suddenly silent (in reaction to Moshe's words), did he remain silent (in spite of Moshe's words), or did this silence precede Moshe's words? Is Aharon's silence an act of nobility? Does it demonstrate an overpowering sense of place and time, not allowing the tragedy to mar the celebration of the day? Or, conversely, does it indicate an inability to answer – a silence in the face of death? Was there anything that Aharon could have said at all?

III. DELEGATION

Subsequent to his short speech to Aharon, Moshe turns to his nephews, commanding them to remove the corpses from the Mishkan: And Moshe called Misha'el and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aharon, and said to them, Come near, carry your brothers from before the sanctuary out of the camp. So they went near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp; as Moshe had said. In other words, neither Aharon nor his two "remaining" sons are to become defiled by participating in what is normally their familial obligation (at least as regards the brothers): burying their own.

Is this delegation of responsibility a response to Aharon's silence? Where are Elazar and Itamar (the two "remaining" brothers) at this time? We soon hear:

And Moshe said to Aharon, and to Elazar and to Itamar, his sons, Uncover not your heads, nor tear your clothes; lest you die, and lest anger come upon all the people; but let your brothers, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which Hashem has kindled. And you shall not go out from the door of the Tent of Meeting, lest you die; for the anointing oil of Hashem is upon you. And they did according to the word of Moshe.

We now see that Aharon, Elazar and Itamar are standing by, watching as their sons/brothers are carried out of the Mishkan – and they are not allowed to demonstrate their grief in the traditional manners. That is not to say that their brothers' deaths will go without the proper Avelut. Their Avelut belongs to the entire "House of Yisra'el" – but what does that mean? Does it mean that all of B'nei Yisra'el are to behave as mourners for the entire week (at least) after this tragedy? That would seem to be self-defeating, if the reason for all of this delegation is to maintain the festive air of the day.

In addition, why are the B'nei Yisra'el appointed/delegated as mourners for Nadav and Avihu? What sort of relationship exists between the mourners (*Kol Beit Yisra'el*) and the two deceased sons of Aharon?

One final question on this series of verses: Why does the text point out that they did "according to the words of Mosheh" – if the intent was simply to indicate that they fulfilled these commands, the text could have tersely stated: Vaya'asu Khen – ("and they did thus"); what is added with this longer formula?

IV. COMMAND

Within the realm of legalistic text in the Torah, the most popular and familiar introductory phrase is: vay'Daber Hashem el Mosheh leimor – ("and Hashem spoke to Mosheh, saying"). Occasionally, we encounter an expansion which includes Aharon (e.g. Sh'mot 12:1).. The formula presented in the middle of our narrative – and which "interrupts" the flow of the story – is unique: vay'Daber Hashem el Aharon leimor ("and Hashem spoke to Aharon, saying"). This hapax legomenon is striking for several reasons. It stands in stark contrast to Aharon's silence, mentioned earlier. In addition, it is the first time that we hear about the "second" role of the Kohen – as teacher and instructor of the laws of Hashem. The specific directive prohibits worship by Aharon or his sons (what a painful word that is at this juncture) while intoxicated:

And Hashem spoke to Aharon, saying, Do not drink wine nor strong drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the Tent of Meeting, lest you die; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations; And that you may differentiate between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean; And that you may teach the people of Yisra'el all the statutes which Hashem has spoken to them by the hand of Mosheh.

Why is this particular prohibition (and its extension – instructing in Halakhah while intoxicated – see MT Bi'at Mikdash 1:3 and our discussion in last year's shiur on Parashat Sh'mini, accessible on our website at torah.org/advanced/mikra) presented here, amid the dedication festivities and attendant tragedy? Why is Aharon singled out to receive only this command (all other commands regarding the special status of Kohanim were given through the familiar formula)?

V. EXCEPTION

After Aharon is given this "new" prohibition, Mosheh turns to his brother and nephews, directing them to continue in their worship-acts associated with the offerings already brought:

And Mosheh spoke to Aharon, and to Elazar and to Itamar, his sons, who were left, Take the meal offering that remains of the offerings of Hashem made by fire, and eat it without leaven beside the altar; for it is most holy; And you shall eat it in the holy place, because it is your due, and your sons' due, of the sacrifices of Hashem made by fire; for so I am commanded. And the waved breast and offered shoulder shall you eat in a clean place; you, and your sons, and your daughters with you; for they are your due, and your sons' due, which are given from the sacrifices of peace offerings by the people of Yisra'el. The offered shoulder and the waved breast shall they bring with the offerings made by fire of the fat, to wave it for a wave offering before Hashem; and it shall be yours, and your sons' with you, by a statute forever; as Hashem has commanded.

Why does this directive need to be stated (or, perhaps, repeated) at this point? Don't Aharon and his sons already know the laws of the Kohanic consumption of the offerings (see Vayyikra 6:9)?

The simplest explanation of this interjection is that Aharon and his sons, being in a Halakhic state of mourning (*Aninut*) would have reasonably avoided partaking of any of the sacral foods (see BT Zevahim 101a for the source for this prohibition/disqualification). Hence, Mosheh must instruct them that that is not to be the case on this day. In spite of the death of their sons/brothers, Aharon and his two "remaining" sons are to continue the complete Avodah without interruption or deviation; this day of inauguration serves as an exception to the rule of the disqualification of Aninut.

If that is the sole reason for this exhortative directive, why does Mosheh add the information about the "wave offering" (*Shok haT'rumah v'Hazeh haT'nufah*)? Why add the information regarding the family's rights to the portions of the Sh'lamim (peace-offerings)?

VI. INQUIRY

Having commanded his brother and nephews regarding the completion of the "order of the day", Mosheh finds that they have burned the S'ir haHatot (goat of the sin offering), which the Gemara identifies as the S'ir Rosh Chodesh (sin-offering brought on the first day of the month as part of the Musaf Rosh Chodesh) – instead of eating it:

And Mosheh diligently sought the goat of the sin offering, and, behold, it was burned; and he was angry with Elazar and Itamar, the sons of Aharon, who were left alive, saying, Why have you not eaten the sin offering in the holy place, seeing it is most holy, and God has given it to you to bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before Hashem? Behold, its blood was not brought inside the holy place; you should indeed have eaten it in the holy place, as I commanded.

Why does Mosheh engage in the presentation of an argument as to why they should have eaten it? Isn't it enough for him to remind them – as he does at the end of his "angry" chastisement – that they should have eaten it "as I commanded"? What are we to make of his explanation?

VII. RESPONSE

We again find a unique interaction here. Instead of admitting to fault, Aharon speaks up (in spite of the fact that Mosheh had addressed his sons), defending their action – and Mosheh accepts their defense:

And Aharon said to Mosheh, Behold, this day have they offered their sin offering and their burnt offering before Hashem; and such things

have befallen me; and if I had eaten the sin offering to day, should it have been accepted in the sight of Hashem? And when Mosheh heard that, he was content.

Why didn't Aharon give this response earlier, when Mosheh had commanded him and his sons to partake of the Minchah and the Shok ha'Trumah and Hazeh haT'nuvah? In addition, how could this argument have succeeded, if Mosheh had already commanded them to continue "as if nothing had happened" and to allow the rest of the B'nei Yisra'el to mourn for Nadav and Avihu? Either Aharon and his sons had the status of Onenim (mourners) or not – and, since Mosheh had already excepted them from that status, how could this argument succeed?

VIII. SUMMARY

In reading through Vayyikra Chapter 10, we have noted a significant number of difficulties. Here is a summary of the main questions, although some of them have ancillary inquiries which were raised above:

1) Did Nadav and Avihu err? If so, what was the nature of their error/sin? 2) How do we understand Mosheh's words to Aharon – and Aharon's silence? 3) Why are Aharon's remaining sons not considered mourners – such that the burial of their brothers is delegated to their cousins? What is the role of Kol Beit Yisra'el here – are they all mourners in the strict and complete sense of the word? 4) How should we understand the interjection of the command regarding entering the Mishkan while intoxicated – and that given directly to Aharon? 5) Why does Mosheh have to remind his kin about their obligations regarding the consumption of the offerings? 6) Why does Mosheh present an argument to Elazar and Itamar as to why they shouldn't have burnt the S'ir Rosh Chodesh? 7) How do we understand their successful defense – and why wasn't it stated earlier?

Under ideal circumstances, we would present a survey of the many brilliant and insightful approaches suggested by the Rishonim (they were all sensitive to these difficulties with the text, of course). Due to space limitations, we will have to confine ourselves to using several of their observations as points of departure for a different approach; one which is, I believe, consistent with and reflective of some of the perspectives raised by the Rishonim in their analyses of this difficult chapter.

IX. KEDUSHAT KEHUNAH

Any analysis of this chapter has to begin with the offering brought by Nadav and Avihu. What did they do to merit instantaneous death at the hands of Heaven?

A scan of the two previous chapters – Chapter 8, which details the inauguration ritual (*Milu'im*) and Chapter 9 which describes the events of that day of dedication, we see that the role of Aharon's sons is purely supportive in nature. Not once do we hear their names. They function solely as B'nei Aharon (Aharon's sons) throughout the entire narrative. Until this point, we read "Take Aharon and his sons with him"; only after several verses devoted to the inauguration of Aharon do we hear: "And Mosheh brought the sons of Aharon"; throughout the rest of the Milu'im ceremony, we only hear about Aharon, "his sons" or "Aharon and his sons".

On the day of dedication, we read "And the sons of Aaron brought the blood to him and the sons of Aharon presented to him the blood"; and they presented the burnt offering to him and the sons of Aharon presented to him the blood". Throughout the ceremony, designed to inaugurate Aharon and his sons into their positions as Kohanim, his sons present Aharon with the various items he needs in order to perform the service – but it is clearly his service to perform.

Just before we read about Nadav and Avihu's errant offering, we are told that:

And there came a fire out from before Hashem, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat; which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces.

The ultimate was achieved; God's heavenly fire consumed the offering, indicating His acceptance and readiness to enshrine the Shekhinah among the people.

Suddenly, we do not hear about the "anonymous" sons of Aharon; rather, we are introduced to Nadav and Avihu who are the (two of) the same B'nei Aharon who demonstrated a strong awareness of their position until this point:

And Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon, took each of them his censer, and put fire in it, and put incense on it, and offered strange fire before Hashem, which He commanded them not. And there went out fire from Hashem, and devoured them, and they died before Hashem.

The emphasis on "each his own fire-pan" indicates that this offering was not only bereft of the communal aspect which informed all of the offerings until this point – it was also a totally individualized and self-centered offering. Note the words of the Sifra at the beginning of Parashat Aharei-Mot:

B'nei Aharon – implying that they did not take counsel with Aharon; Nadav va'Avihu – implying that they did not take counsel from Mosheh [see BT Eruvin 63a]; Ish Mah'tato (each his own fire-pan) – implying that they did not take counsel from each other. (see also Vayyikra Rabbah 20:8)

The Torah uses two additional (and more explicit) terms to indicate their sin: strange fire and which He commanded them not. Essentially, their sin was in considering that once they had been designated, inaugurated and sanctified, they had the latitude to present worship in their own manner – subverting their own roles as assistants to their father. Far beyond this sin, however, was the underlying perspective which motivated their behavior: We can dictate how to worship. When we approach God, we may do so on our own terms and with our own offering. The Midrash's reading of their refusal to take counsel with Mosheh and Aharon before bringing their offering is indicative of this errant perspective.

What Nadav and Avihu evidently failed to understand was the metamorphosis which was effected through the Milu'im process. Whereas, until now, Nadav and Avihu were two individuals, sons of Aharon and nephews of Mosheh; now they were accorded the lofty – but limiting – status of B'nei Aharon. Pursuant to their sanctification, Aharon and his sons became the representatives of the entire nation – this great privilege carried with it the awesome responsibility of maintaining constant humility in the face of the Mishkan where that representation is realized.

X. RESPONSES

We can now review our questions and answer each, following the explanation presented in the previous section:

- 1) Did Nadav and Avihu err? If so, what was the nature of their error/sin? They certainly sinned – in taking worship into their own hands. They not only overstepped their role as B'nei Aharon, they also, thereby, violated the trust of the B'nei Yisra'el.
- 2) How do we understand Mosheh's words to Aharon – and Aharon's silence? Mosheh told Aharon biK'rovai Ekadesh – meaning that I am only sanctified through the actions of those who I have brought close. In other words, Mosheh was telling Aharon that Nadav and Avihu erred in thinking that because they had been sanctified as B'nei Aharon, that they were now fit to effect the sanctification of the Mishkan on their own. Who can sanctify God? Who can bring His Shekhinah into the presence of the people? Only someone selected by God Himself. Aharon's silence is easily understood – what could he say? He certainly couldn't disagree, claiming that Nadav and Avihu had been sufficiently close to God. On the other hand, agreeing to that statement implied that he, Aharon, is sufficiently close. Humility prevented him from answering – so he was silent.
- 3) Why are Aharon's remaining sons not considered mourners – such that the burial of their brothers is delegated to their cousins? What is the role of Kol Beit Yisra'el here – are they all mourners in the strict and complete sense of the word? This is the lesson of the entire chapter: B'nei Aharon do not "belong to themselves". They are both Sh'luchei Didan (our agents) as well as Sh'luchei d'Rach'mana (agents of God – see BT Kiddushin 23b) – with all of the privileges and responsibilities thereof. Although the Rishonim are divided as to whether Elazar and Itamar would have been obligated to bury their brothers if it were not for this special occasion, what is clear is that, at the very least, as the Mishkan is being dedicated, the Kohanim are getting the clear message that their role as communal representatives overrides their full participation in family life. The "upside" of that is that their family is much larger – all of B'nei Yisra'el are considered their family, such that the mourning for their brothers will be shared among the entire nation.
- 4) How should we understand the interjection of the command regarding entering the Mishkan while intoxicated – and that given directly to Aharon? Mosheh has just explained the death of Nadav and Avihu to Aharon – they miscalculated, thinking that anyone who is part of the designated family may sanctify. Mosheh's response – that only one whom God brings close may sanctify – could still leave Aharon wondering: "How do I know – or anyone else, for that matter – that I am sufficiently close to God? Perhaps my role in the sin of the golden calf has marred that closeness, if it ever existed?" To assuage that concern, God gave Aharon the greatest sign of closeness – by speaking directly to him (and only him). God "focusing" His command to Aharon is a sure sign of Aharon being worthy to sanctify the Mishkan. As far as the command itself, we may posit as follows: The sin of Nadav and Avihu was taking matters into their own hands (figuratively as well as literally). The zealousness which accompanies celebration and can, if unchecked, lead to such errant and dangerous behavior, is most easily exemplified by intoxication. A person is so carried away with the ecstasy of the nearness to God that he desires to break down all boundaries – including those which are necessary to maintain an environment of Kedushah. The additional role of Kohanim mentioned at the end of this command serves to strengthen the message of the chapter – that Kohanim's role is not only representative but also instructive and, as such, have a great responsibility towards B'nei Yisra'el.
- 5) Why does Mosheh have to remind his kin about their obligations regarding the consumption of the offerings? Again, the basic message – these gifts are given to you not by dint of who you are – but rather because God has chosen you to represent His people in the Mishkan. These gifts are given to God – who grants them to the family of Aharon miShulhan Gavohah.
- 6) Why does Mosheh present an argument to Elazar and Itamar as to why they shouldn't have burnt the S'ir Rosh Chodesh? Mosheh is explaining their role to the sons of Aharon – it is your job to complete this service in order to repair the relationship between God and the people. You must rise above your personal tragedy in order to act for the people. 7) How do we understand their successful defense – and why wasn't it stated earlier?

As mentioned above, the Gemara identifies this offering as the Musaf Rosh Chodesh; unlike the other offerings (which Mosheh had addressed earlier), this was an ongoing offering, to be brought every month. Whereas the suspension of personal grief for the celebration of dedication would be in accord with Mosheh's command, this offering is of a different nature. Aharon's successful defense of his sons' behavior demonstrates the difference between the celebration of dedication and ongoing worship – but proper analysis of that topic is beyond the scope of this shiur.

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