

**Potomac Torah Study Center**

Vol. 8 #25, April 9, 2021; Shemini; Yom HaShoah 5781

**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.**

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

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**Dedicated this Shabbat in Memory of yahrtzeits of four beloved family members this week: Yetta Franks (aunt, 25 Nisan); Nathalie Morrison (Hannah's mother, 26 Nisan); Leonard Franks (cousin, 27 Nisan) (Yom HaShoah); and Anne Fisher (mother, 28 Nisan).** Note: Yom HaShoah is moved a day early this year, 26 Nisan, to avoid running into Shabbat.

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During a non-leap year, we usually read Tzav right before Pesach and Shemini the week after Pesach. This timing puts Shemini near the beginning of Sefira, during the week of Yom HaShoah. For my family, it is the week of yahrtzeits – my beloved Aunt Yetta Franks (25 Nisan), mother-in-law (Nathalie Morrison, 26 Nisan), cherished cousin Leonard Franks (27 Nisan, the usual date for Yom HaShoah), and mother (28 Nisan).

The emotional highs and lows in Shemini give a preview of those in our calendar. We start with one of the most exciting high points in Jewish history – the dedication of the Mishkan. The Jews must have experienced great drama as a fire from Hashem came down from the sky, lit the alter of the Mishkan, burned the korban, and restored Hashem's presence (in a cloud above the alter) among the people. During the celebrations, however, Nadav and Avihu, two sons of Aharon, took their firepans, and brought incense to the alter. God again sent a fire from heaven, but this fire consumed Nadav and Avihu. They became unintended korbanot, because they crossed over from human to God's reserved space without God's permission. On the day that God directed Aharon and his sons to be initiated into the service of performing God's korbanot, they had to mourn the death of two sons/brothers – but they could not leave the sacred area around the alter, could not participate in public mourning, and could not come into contact with the bodies.

Sefira, the period when we count each day and week between Pesach and Shavuot, is primarily a period of mourning, because so many tragic events happened during this period. Rebbe Akiva had 24,000 students, but all of them died between Pesach and Shavuot because they did not treat each other with kavod (Yevamos 62b). The Knesseth established Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, on 27 Nisan (moved a day earlier when necessary to avoid running into Shabbat) in 1951, in part because the 1943 Warsaw uprising started the day before Pesach and continued for four weeks, well into Sefira. During this uprising, 13,000 Jews died, half burnt alive or suffocated. At other times in our history, many murders during the Crusades and pogroms in eastern Europe also took place during Sefira.

The death of Nadav and Avihu on the eighth day of the inauguration of the Mishkan connects to what happened on the first reported story in the Torah after the first Shabbat (Bereishis, chapter 3). My close friend, Rabbi Jonathan Grossman, observed to Rabbi David Fohrman that this first reported post-Shabbat story was when Chava and Adam performed the first sin. They disobeyed God's one rule in Gan Eden, not to eat from His special tree. The consequence of disobeying that commandment was that man lost infinite life and became subject to dying. In both instances, when man tries to disobey God and crosses over into God's realm, the consequence is death.

In a leap year, when we have an extra month, Shemini comes a month earlier, normally right after Purim rather than right after Pesach. Rabbi Fohrman observes that the dedication of the Mishkan has many parallels with the Megillah both in content and in specific language. In both cases, there is a big feast lasting for seven days and then a more restricted feast in the inner sanctum of God's special place (near the alter) or the king's chambers (Purim). In both cases, those in God's or the king's inner space could not leave until the ceremony was over. In both cases, there were special garments for kavod (splendor) and tif'erit (beauty). In both Purim and the Mishkan dedication, someone died (Vashti and Aharon's two sons). In both cases, the royal tapestries were made of the same materials and had the same colors. In the Megillah, the king's 127 provinces remind us of 127 in another context – Sarah's age when she died. ("Sarah" means "princess," so there is another connection between Sarah and the king.)

The excitement of finding new connections across Tanach is a precious legacy from my many years learning from my precious Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l. Many times a detail in the Torah that I overlooked, with Rabbi Cahan's insights, became a key to fascinating insights. Following some links from the dedication of the Mishkan across Jewish history is but one example of the excitement that studying Torah brings me each week. Even when the links involve death, we can learn from human errors and hopefully find ways to leave our world a better place than we found it.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

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**Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at [www.alephbeta.org](http://www.alephbeta.org). Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.**

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Menachem Mendel ben Chana, Eli ben Hanina, Yoram HaKohen ben Shoshana, 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, Ramesh bat Heshmat, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers.**

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Hannah & Alan

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**Drasha: Shemini: White Noise**  
by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 2001

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

It was the last day of the Mishkan's inauguration. The joy was immeasurable, somewhat akin to the ribbon-cutting ceremony of a cherished king's new palace — in this case, a shrine to the glory of the King of kings and to the splendor of His reign. But in a tragic anticlimactic sequence, the celebration went terribly wrong. The children of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, entered into the realm of the outer limits, the Holy of Holies, the Kodesh HaKedoshim. They offered incense, something they assumed would surely bring joy to their Creator. But it was their own recipe.

Uncommanded, and uncalled for, something went terribly wrong. "A fire came forth from before Hashem and consumed them, and they died before Hashem" (Leviticus 10:1-2). It's hard for us, here, to fathom the pain. Remember that picture of a smiling schoolteacher and her fellow astronauts, waving in anticipation of another successful mission on America's galactic pride and joy, only to be vaporized into a mist of memories plunging toward the ocean in a disastrous fate? The beloved children of a beloved leader on a beloved day in a beloved service were gone in an instant, from glory to death. Yet their own father did not react in open agony, rather only through silence and acceptance. "And Aaron was silent" (ibid v. 3). That silence was not only commended, but extolled. As a reward for that stoic reaction of acceptance, the next command in the Torah is offered directly to Aharon without Moshe, who normally was the principal in receiving Heavenly directives.

Yet despite the praise meted to Aharon for his silence, the nation is commanded to react in a diametrically opposed manner. Moshe commands the nation, "the entire House of Israel shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited" (Leviticus 10:6). Aharon is praised for his silence, yet the nation is told to openly bewail the tragedy. What is the difference?

**Back in the 1800's, the Magid of Trisk and Reb Mendel of Vorke were dear friends living next to each other. But, unfortunately Rav Mendel had to move to the other side of the forest, a distance of a half-a-day's walk. Seeing his agony, Reb Mendel's sexton, Moishele, anxiously offered to make the three-hour trip each Friday to deliver correspondence.**

**And so it went. Every Friday morning, Moishele would set out across the forest and deliver Reb Mendel's letter to the Trisker Magid. He would wait for the Magid to read the letter and reply. Often it would take a while until the Magid returned from his study, eyes red from tears, his quivering hand holding the magnificently crafted response in a special envelope. Moishele would deliver the response to the Vorke Rebbe, and that letter, too, evoked the same emotional response: tears of joy and meaning filled the Rebbe's eyes.**

**After a year as a faithful envoy, Moishele's curiosity overtook him. "What possibly can those letters contain? Would it be so bad if I took a peek?" Therefore, one Friday he carefully opened the envelope — without disturbing the seal. He saw absolutely nothing. Just a blank paper rested between the walls of the envelope.**

**Shocked, Moshe carefully, placed the so-called letter back into the envelope and delivered it to the Trisker Maggid. Like clockwork, the Rebbe went into the study, and a half-hour later, bleary-eyed and shaken, he returned a letter to be delivered to his friend Reb Mendel of Vorke.**

**At this point, Moishele could not wait to leave the house and race back into the forest, where he would secretly bare the contents of the envelope, hoping to solve the mysterious exchange.**

**Again, blank paper. Moishele was mortified. "Have I been schlepping six hours each week with blank papers? What is this a game?" he wondered.**

**The entire Shabbos he could not contain his displeasure. Motzoai Shabbos, Reb Mendel called him in to his study. "You seem agitated, my dear shamas," he asked. "What seems to be the problem?"**

**"Problem?" he responded. "You know those letters I've been carrying. I admit it. I looked, this Friday. There was nothing in them! They were blank! What kind of game is this?"**

**Reb Mendel, did not flinch. "The Torah," he said, "has black letters on white parchment. The black contain the words we express. The white contains a message that is deeper than letters. Our feelings are often expressed through black letters. This week, we wrote with the white parchment. We expressed an emotion that transcends letters."**

It is very important to realize one cannot equate the reaction required by a mourner to that of the responsive community. Not everyone is on the level to keep quiet. For those who can make their statement of faith and strength through silence, that is an amazing expression. For the rest of us, who are not on that level, we must express our sorrow and exclaim it in a human way as afforded by the dictates of Moshe.

## Shemini: Religious Life and/or Halakha

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2021

What is the place of religious passion in the life that is dedicated to halakha? After eight days of sanctifying and inaugurating the Mishkan, a fire comes out from heaven and consumes the final sacrifices of the inauguration. The people are so overwhelmed by religious feeling that they bow down and prostrate themselves.

Two of Aharon's sons are even more moved by this experience. They are so overtaken by the events that they are driven by their religious passion to get even closer to God. Each one brings a fire pan of incense and offers it to God. The result? A fire comes down from God and, rather than consuming their offering, consumes Nadav and Avihu, killing them. Their religious passion leads to their death.

What was so wrong with their offering? The Torah emphasizes that what they brought was “אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוָּה ה אֱלֹהִים – what God had not commanded,” (Leviticus 10.1). The message seems clear — our way of connecting to God is following what God commands us to do. It is living a structured life defined by obedience. This message is repeated multiple times in the remainder of the parsha. When Moshe relays commandments to Aharon and his sons, the Torah says that “they did as Moshe had commanded.” (Leviticus 10.4 and 10.7).

This point is made even more explicit in the passage that follows. God commands Aharon that he and his sons — Kohanim — may not drink wine or intoxicating liquid when they enter the Tent of Meeting. Wine and liquor can create an elevated mental state, allowing a person to act more freely and outside of the norms that generally govern his actions. Such a state of mind, however, is exactly what is not desired in the service of God. Rather, the Kohanim must be clear-minded and sober, to “separate between the holy and profane, and between that which is forbidden and that which is permitted” (Leviticus 10.10). This is nothing other than a life of halakha: to live a regimented life, being constantly aware of what is permitted and what is forbidden.

In the ending section of the parsha — where the kosher and non-kosher animals are categorized — this message is repeated yet again. This categorization is nothing other than, as we are told, to “separate between what is permitted and what is forbidden, between the animals that may be eaten, and those which may not” (Leviticus 11.47).

In our own lives, we have experienced the horrific results of unrestrained religious passion. Flying a plane into the Twin Towers, religiously-driven terrorism and wars — all of these make it unquestionably clear that religious passion must be contained. If it is to exist, it must do so within the bounds of morality, within what “God has commanded.”

I think, however, that we may have over-learned this message. Our lives tend to be only halakha. Isn't there a place for religious passion if it operates within the proper boundaries?

Rav Kook, for one, believed so. For him, over the 2000 years of living in exile, our religious life became desiccated. It turned into empty forms of worship, halakha without agadata, a body without a soul. With the return to Israel, this sickly creature began showing signs of life, and there was a return to religious passion and creativity. For Rav Kook, that is a central part of what it means to connect to God, to be alive in one's religion. The halakha creates the boundaries for that religious life, true, but that dimension is necessary and essential.

We have too often focused on the “מִתְּנַשְּׁאָר לֹא צִוָּה ה” to ignore or even exorcise a life of religious passion. What would it mean to look at Nadav and Avihu with envy for people like them, who can be so moved to get closer to God? What would it mean to bring soul and religious longing into action and obedience? It would be a transformation of a life of observance to a life of religiosity.

Shabbat Shalom.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2021/04/religious-life-and-or-halakha/>

## The Thrills of Life

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine\* © 2021 Teach 613

It was inauguration day. The Jewish people had worked so hard to accomplish the unbelievable. They had created an earthly dwelling place for G-d. The Mishkan (Sanctuary) would be a place where man and G-d could meet and communicate on the highest levels. Finally, everything was ready. The Kohanim (priests) were duly anointed and the first Korbanos (sacrifices) were placed on the Mizbeia (Altar). The Jewish people waited anxiously. Would their overtures for closeness with G-d indeed be accepted?

Then it happened. A miraculous fire emerged and consumed the offerings. The people saw and rejoiced; they broke into elated song.

The great ecstatic moment described here is essentially the same concept as a Siyum, the celebration we make upon completing a significant endeavor. There is a precious thrill at the moment that it becomes clear that you have succeeded in a goal. This is particularly true if the goal is one that involved overcoming challenges and is a goal that could only be accomplished by persevering over a significant period of time.

What is interesting about thrills is that overcoming challenge to reach a goal can produce a thrill even if the goal is man-made and frivolous.

I recall an incident where I was asked by parents to reach out to their son who was in his 20s and was “wasting his time away playing video games.” I set up a time to talk with the young man, and as I began to broach the topic of video games, the young man got passionate and told me, “Rabbi, maybe you can help. My parents think I am wasting my time on the computer. They have even said that they think I am addicted. Maybe you can make them understand. I am on this international team and it took many weeks for us to have collaborated successfully to slay 3 dragons. We have 27 people on our team. We have earned hundreds of gold tokens. Maybe if you can explain this to my parents, they would understand better and have a little bit more respect for what I do.”

More recently, I had the opportunity to meet with a young man who I am coaching. At one point he was deeply dependent on games and movies, but slowly he has stepped out of that method of recreation. He has deleted many apps that would regularly suck him in; he really feels that he has regained his life.

As I often do, I suggested that he make sure that his withdrawal from these apps should be a healthy one. I suggested that he make sure to replace the thrills he was getting, with other, healthy thrills of life, encouraging him to take up exercise, enjoying the pleasures of nature and the outdoors, learning goals, and simple relaxation techniques. He promised me that he would try, but he said, “Rabbi, you need to understand. This journey took me months. Just to succeed and go to bed without needing my device is itself thrilling.”

Long term endeavors will produce a thrill when we succeed. It is our task to choose our goals wisely so that when we succeed, we experience a sanctified thrill that we can be forever proud of.

With heartfelt blessings for a wonderful Shabbos!!

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## Improving the World, One Person at a Time: Angel for Shabbat, Parashat Shemini

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

Aaron the High Priest was called upon to officiate at the sacrificial service of the Tabernacle. This was obviously a special moment in his leadership and he surely should have been eager to fulfill God's will. Yet, the Torah indicates that Moses spoke to Aaron: approach the altar and perform the necessary rites (Vayikra 9:7). The famous commentator, Rashi, offers an explanation as to why Aaron needed this extra prodding from Moses. "Because Aaron was diffident and afraid to approach. Moses said to him: why are you diffident? You were chosen for this."

One explanation for Aaron's diffidence is that he was a genuinely humble person, and felt himself unworthy of the honor and responsibility conferred upon him. This is a tribute to his fine character. He did not seek glory or public accolades; he preferred to be a quiet, private person out of the limelight. Moses had to remind Aaron: you must overcome your reluctance, you are qualified to do this work, you were chosen to be the High Priest.

My grandfather Marco Romey used to tell us: everyone is put on earth with a mission to fulfill. We are each "chosen" to do something with the particular talents and insights that the Almighty has given us. People fail in life because they don't realize that they have a mission, or because they don't feel they have the capacity to do great things. We all need to be reminded (as Aaron was reminded by Moses): don't be diffident, you were chosen to fulfill a mission, you can do important and great things. One person really can make a difference.

We need to focus on what our "mission" in life is--as Jews and as human beings. What are our particular strengths and weaknesses, where can we make the most positive impact, how can we organize our lives in a way most conducive to fulfilling our mission? We also need to overcome feelings of powerlessness and inadequacy. We should not internalize the notion that other people (no matter how great and learned) know better than we ourselves how we can best fulfill our lives. The process of identifying our "mission" requires much serious and candid thought; and then it requires the courage to act in a responsible way to make our lives--and the lives of others--better, happier, more meaningful.

We also need to remind ourselves that "great" things are often accomplished quietly and privately, through acts of idealism, generosity of spirit, compassion. A kind word, a thoughtful deed, a loving affirmation--these can give untold happiness and meaningfulness to others, as well as deep satisfaction to ourselves. Some years ago I read an article about people who were asked to list the ten people they most admired. While some of the respondents listed famous politicians or wealthy philanthropists, all of them listed family members, clergy, teachers, friends who had helped them through difficult times. Whom do we most admire? Why do we admire them? How can we emulate them in our own lives?

Can one person really make a difference? The surprising answer is: Yes. If that person understands his/her mission and has the courage to strive to achieve it, the answer is: Yes. If that person recognizes that spiritual greatness can be achieved through idealism, kindness, compassion and service to others, the answer is: Yes. If that person seeks righteousness and walks humbly with God, the answer is: Yes.

\* <https://www.jewishideas.org/improving-world-one-person-time> **The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](https://www.jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.**

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### **The Jews of Rhodes and Cos: In Memoriam**

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

One of the great writers of the 20th century, himself a Holocaust survivor, was Primo Levi. In his book, Other Peoples' Trades, he reminisces about his childhood home in Turin, Italy. In his nostalgic description, he remembers how his father would enter the house and put his umbrella or cane in a receptacle near the front door. In providing other details of the entrance way to the house, Primo Levi mentions that for many years "there hung from a nail a large key whose purpose everyone had forgotten but which nobody dared throw away (p. 13)."

Haven't we all had keys like that? Haven't we all faced the mystery of an unknown key! What door will it open? What treasures will it unlock? We do not know where the key fits...but we are reluctant to toss it out. We suspect that if we did discard the key, we would later discover its use; we would then need it but no longer have it!

The key might be viewed as a parable to life. It is a gateway to our past, our childhood homes, our families, our old schools, old friends. Over the years, we have forgotten a lot...but we also remember a lot. We dare not throw away the key that opens up our memories, even if we are not always certain where those memories will lead us.

The mysterious key not only may open up or lock away personal memories; it also functions on a national level. As Jews, the key can unlock thousands of years of history. Today, with trembling, we take the key that opens memories of the Jews deported by the Nazis in late July 1944, the brutal torture and murder of the Jews of Rhodes and Cos.

Some doors lock away tragedies so terrible that we do not want to find the key to open them. But if we do not open them, we betray the victims and we betray ourselves.

I remember my first visit to Rhodes in the summer of 1974, as I was completing my doctoral dissertation on the history of the Jews of Rhodes. I had intended to stay for several weeks; but I left much sooner. I felt very uncomfortable as I walked through the once Jewish neighborhood, now almost totally devoid of Jews. I instinctively resented the many well-tanned European tourists strutting through the streets without a care in the world. I felt that I was witnessing a circus built atop a graveyard.

The Jews are—unfortunately—well experienced in coping with tragedy. How have we managed to flourish for all these many centuries? How have we maintained an indomitable optimism in spite of all that we have endured?

Some years ago, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Horowitz (known as the Bostoner Rebbe) wrote an article in which he described two concepts in the Jewish reaction to the destruction of our Temples in Jerusalem in antiquity. During those horrific times when the first Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE and the second Temple was razed by the Romans in 70 CE, the Jewish people may have thought that Jewish history had come to an end. Not only was their central religious shrine destroyed; many hundreds of thousands of Jews were murdered, or sold into slavery, or exiled from their land.

The rabbinic sages of those times developed ways to remember the tragedies—but not to be overwhelmed and defeated by them. One concept was *zekher lehurban*, remembering the destruction. Customs arose to commemorate the sadness and sense of loss that pervaded our people's consciousness. One custom was not to paint one's home in full but to leave a part of the ceiling unpainted...*zekher lehurban*. Fast days were established to commemorate the destructions; dirges were composed to be chanted on those sad days. On Tisha B'Av we sit on the floor as mourners...*zekher lehurban*. Even at a wedding—a happy occasion—the bridegroom steps on a glass to remind us that all is not well in the world; the shattering experiences of antiquity and the destructions of our Temples continue to be remembered.

But our sages developed another concept as well: *zekher lemikdash*, remembering the Temple. Practices were created whereby we literally re-create the rites and customs that took place in the Temple. At the Passover Seder, we eat the "Hillel's sandwich"—*zekher lemikdash*, to re-enact what our ancestors did in the Temple in Jerusalem in ancient times. During Succoth, we take the lulav and etrog for seven days and we make hakafot in the synagogue—*zekher lemikdash*, to re-enact the practices of the ancient Temples. We treat our dinner tables as altars, akin to the altars in the Temples: we wash our hands ritually before eating; we put salt on our bread before tasting it—*zekher lemikdash*. Our synagogues feature the Ner Tamid, eternal light; they often have a menorah—because these things were present in the ancient Temples.

Whereas *zekher lehurban* evokes sadness and tears, *zekher lemikdash* evokes optimism. We carry the Temple ritual forward...even in the absence of the Temples. We continue to live, to thrive, to move forward.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Horowitz wisely observed: "Our people has come to deal with its need to mourn in an unusual, almost paradoxical way. We not only cry in remembrance of the Temple, we dance too."

Among our Sephardic customs is the *meldado*, a study session held on the anniversary of the death of a loved one. I well remember the *meldados* observed in my childhood home and in the homes of relatives. Family and friends would gather in the hosts' homes. Prayer services were held. *Mishnayot* were read. The rabbi would share words of Torah. The event evoked a spirit of family and communal solidarity, solemnity, reminiscing. But *meldados* were not sad occasions! After the prayers and study, there was an abundance of food prepared by the hostess. People ate, and chatted, and laughed. People would remember stories about the deceased person whose *meldado* was being observed, drawing on the good and happy memories. The memorialized person would have wanted family and friends to celebrate, to remember him or her with happiness and laughter.

Today, we are in a sense observing the *meldado* of our fellow Jews in Rhodes and Cos who were humiliated, tortured and murdered...solely because they were Jews. When the key to the past opens to the Holocaust, we cannot help but

shudder. We are shocked by the mass inhumanity of the perpetrators. We are distressed by the suffering of so many innocents.

But our key must open doors beyond grief and despair. Those Jews who died in the Holocaust would not want us to mourn forever. They would want us to respect their memories by carrying on with life, by ensuring that Jewish life flourishes, by maintaining classic Jewish optimism and hope.

We come together as a community, very much as the victims of the Holocaust would have appreciated. We sense strong bonds of solidarity as we pray in this synagogue—Congregation Ezra Bessaroth—that was established over a century ago by Jews who had come to Seattle from Rhodes. We sing the same prayers, chant the same melodies that the Holocaust victims prayed and sang. We announce to them, and to the world: we are alive, we are carrying forth our sacred traditions, we have not forgotten and will never forget. Our key is firmly in hand.

Years ago, my wife and I took our children to Rhodes. On the Friday night that we were there, our son Hayyim and I led services in the Kahal Shalom, in the same style as services here at Ezra Bessaroth. The synagogue in Rhodes was empty except for a minyan of tourists. Yet, I felt that our voices went very high, that the ghosts of all the earlier generations of Rhodesies somehow heard our prayers and rejoiced that the tradition has continued through the next generations.

I had that same feeling here in synagogue this morning. We are not only praying for ourselves; we are in some mysterious way praying with our ancestors, with all the earlier generations of our people. Our generation is linked with theirs; our lives are tied to theirs. And our generation is linked to the younger generations and the generations yet to come. The eternal chain of the Jewish people is indestructible.

The keys of life open up many doors of sadness and consolation, many doors of commitment, joy and rebuilding. Each of us, knowingly or unknowingly, carries a key to the Jewish future of our families and our communities. As we remember the Jewish martyrs of Rhodes and Cos, we also must remember the sacred privilege that is ours: to carry forth with a vibrant, happy and strong Jewish life.

Am Yisrael Hai. Od Avinu Hai. The people of Israel lives; our Eternal Father lives.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/jews-rhodes-and-cos-memoriam> Rabbi Marc D. Angel delivered this sermon on July 26, 2014 at Congregation Ezra Bessaroth in Seattle, Washington. On that Shabbat, the community marked the 70th anniversary of the deportation of Jews from the islands of Rhodes and Cos in July 1944, nearly all of whom were murdered in Auschwitz. Originally posted in observance of Holocaust Memorial Day, May 2, 2019.

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## **Computers, Holiness and the Power of Change: Thoughts on Parashat Shemini** by Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

In 1980, our synagogue office became computerized. Each of our staff members was given a computer on which to do our work. My computer sat in my office in an unopened box for about a year. A member of the synagogue Board visited me one day and saw the box. He asked why I wasn't using the computer.

I answered: I don't need it. I have a secretary. I have an electric typewriter. Why should I get started with this newfangled contraption? He immediately asked to use my phone, and he called a friend who was a computer teacher. For the next two days, she came to my office and taught me how to use the computer. After those two days, I became "addicted" to the computer, and don't know how I could live without it.

This episode came to mind recently, when I had a discussion with a computer expert from Los Angeles who has many older clients who did not have computers during their childhoods. He told me that one of the biggest problems is getting these people to overcome their psychological resistance to entering the world of computers.

Why did I leave my computer box unopened for a year? Why do people resist learning new computer programs?

The problem does not stem from intellectual or physical inability. Once we learn to use computers, we do fine. The problem is different: it entails overcoming a psychological barrier. A new way of doing things tends to threaten the way

we've always done things in the past; it threatens our comfort level, our feeling of being in control. We suddenly become dependent on technicians, who seem to speak in a language we can't fully understand. The world is changing rapidly, and we are becoming dinosaurs. Stop the world, I want to get off!

But once we overcome these psychological barriers, we can enter the new age and learn the necessary skills, and actually find satisfaction and joy in our progress. The determining factor is: do we have the right mindset? Do we have the will to change? Do we have the inner strength to start from scratch, as though we're back in first grade?

This dilemma, in a different form, is raised in this week's Torah reading. God tells us: "sanctify yourselves and be holy; for I am holy." Rashi points out that "sanctify yourselves" means we need to develop the right attitude; "be holy" can be fulfilled only after we want to sanctify ourselves.

Just as some people have psychological barriers about computers and other technology, some have psychological barriers about religion. They prefer to leave the "box of religion" unopened, because it may challenge their comfort level. They are nervous about religious faith, about commitment to mitzvoth, about changing their lifestyles. Or, they may already be religiously observant, but they are uneasy about getting more deeply involved, more intensely learned; they don't know where this will lead. They don't want to upset the status quo.

The Torah is aware of these concerns; so it teaches us first to sanctify ourselves, to develop an open and receptive attitude, to reach a proper comfort level in our spiritual growth. Once we have made this internal shift in the way we approach life, we can then go to the next step: be holy. We can grow in our religious knowledge and commitment without being blocked by self-imposed psychological barriers.

People crave spirituality, but are afraid of spirituality. They don't know how to express it. Or they fear that it will lead them to change in new, untested directions. The Torah assures us: don't be afraid. We can overcome our resistances and our anxieties. We just need to start by sanctifying ourselves, by teaching ourselves to be receptive, by changing our attitudes. If we can overcome these internal psychological barriers, we can then move on in a more productive, more creative, and happier way.

People fail in life not because they don't have the power to change and to grow; but because they inwardly resist change and growth. People succeed in life because they have the strength to learn, to grow, to see life as an unfolding adventure which should be lived with courage and vitality.

\* <https://www.jewishideas.org/computers-holiness-and-power-change-thoughts-parashat-shemini>

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## **Parshas Shemini – Seeking Imperfection**

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer \*

In the opening verses of the laws of Kosher foods, we find an unusual and vague instruction given to Moshe. "And Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Aharon to say to them. Speak to the children of Israel saying, 'This is the animal that you should eat from all of the animals that are on the land.'" (Vayikra 11:1-2) Moshe and Aharon are told to tell "them" to speak to the children of Israel, but we are not told who "they" are.

The Medrash (Vayikra Rabbah 13:1) quotes Rabi Pinchas and Rabi Yirmiyah who learn that "them" is referring to the subject of the previous verses. The previous verses tell how Aharon and his younger sons, Elazar and Isamar, did not eat from the sin offering as they normally would have, since they were in mourning for Aharon's oldest sons, Nadav and Avihu, who had died that day. Moshe had rebuked Elazar and Isamar for not eating from the sin offering. Aharon defended them, explaining to Moshe that Elazar and Isamar had been correct, since they were in mourning. Moshe, in his great humility, immediately accepted Aharon's response and admitted his error. It was Elazar and Isamar, the subject of these verses, whom they were now being told to instruct to teach the laws of Kosher.

The Medrash continues and explains that the honor being bestowed upon Elazar and Isamar here, to share with Moshe and Aharon in teaching these laws to the Jewish people, was not only unique and unusual, but was a complete turnaround for Elazar and Isamar. When Aharon had sinned in his involvement with the Golden Calf, there was initially a decree in Heaven that all of Aharon's children should die. On this day, when half that decree was carried out with the

death of Nadav and Avihu, Aharon's younger sons were spared and then catapulted to great honor and distinction! How did they merit to completely reverse their decree?

The Medrash tells us that the secret of Elazar and Isamar's achievements is also found in the previous verses. When Moshe rebuked them, they knew the law that a mourner could not partake in a sin offering. Yet, out of respect for Moshe they did not correct him and quietly accepted his criticism. This is why Aharon responded even though Moshe had challenged them, because he saw that they were not defending themselves. The Medrash says that this is an example of the verse in Mishlei, "An ear that listens to life-giving rebuke, will abide among the wise." (Mishlei 15:31) Their willingness to accept rebuke, reversed their decree completely, and for these laws G-d treated them as equals of the wise ones – Moshe and Aharon.

The quote at the end of the Medrash is difficult to understand. Elazar and Isamar were not accepting rebuke when they stood silently. They knew they were right. They were only showing respect for Moshe, choosing not to correct their leader and teacher. Yet, the Medrash calls this an example of accepting rebuke. Why is their merit being described as accepting rebuke, rather than the merit of showing respect for Moshe?

Perhaps, the answer lies in the wording of the verse in Mishlei, "An ear that listens to life-giving rebuke." When Moshe began rebuking them, they were listening with open ears, eager to hear life-giving guidance and find ways to improve themselves and achieve more in life. Their ability to be silent when they realized Moshe was wrong, was an expression of that attitude. It was this attitude, more so than the respect they showed Moshe, which not only made them worthy of life, but made them worthy of great honor and distinction. It was having an ear opened wide for criticism which catapulted them to success.

One of the greatest challenges in life is admitting our mistakes and acknowledging that we still have room to improve, even in areas we thought we had done well. This Medrash gives us encouragement and strength to face that challenge by showing us how greatly Hashem values and rewards us for having an attitude of growth. Seeking our imperfections and finding areas for growth can be a most powerful merit.

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### The Three "Yoms"

by Rabbi Moshe Rube\*

Today is the Yom Hashoah. Next week is Yom Hazikaron (Israel's memorial day) and Yom Haatzmaut (Israeli Independence Day).

Such is the season when we tell the story of modern Jewish destruction and rebirth. While usually we think of these days separately, I don't think it's possible now to get through today without recognizing the hope of next week.

Viktor Frankl in "Man's Search for Meaning," his testament of his experience in Auschwitz, states:

*"Those who know how close the connection is between the state of mind of a man --his courage and hope, or lack of them – and the state of immunity of his body will understand that sudden loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect."*

We see this in our Torah portion this week. When Aaron lost two of his children (Leviticus 10) by fire, Moses says a strange thing that hardly seems consoling. "This is what God said, I will be sanctified by those closest to me and will be honored throughout the whole nation." What kind of consolation is this? God took Aaron's children so He could be honored?

That's why we must read the verse not as an explanation of the past. Some tragedies are so horrific, we cannot fathom them. Rather Moses is saying to Aaron that despite this terrible blow, hope is not lost. Our mission of spreading God's values and truth will be fulfilled. "Those closest to me" refers to Aaron and his remaining two sons. As the verses continue, we see Moshe emphasizing the mission of the priests to teach Israel (10:11) which fits in well with this

explanation. Moshe wasn't trying to explain the unexplainable past. He was trying to give hope for Aaron and his family's future.

Never can we "explain" the Holocaust. The loss was too great. The wounds too deep. But we can hope. We can hope that Israel dwells in safety and security. We can hope that the existence of Medinat Yisrael will make sure that such a terrible crime never again darkens humanity's door. We can hope.

Shabbat Shalom.

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### Rav Kook Torah

#### Shemini: Mourning for Nadav and Avihu

After the tragic deaths of Aaron's sons Nadav and Avihu, Moses instructed Aaron and his remaining sons not to display any public signs of mourning:

*"Do not let your hair grow untended, and do not rend your garments.... And as far as your brothers are concerned, the entire house of Israel will mourn the ones whom God has burned."*  
(Lev. 10:6)

Why was Aaron not allowed to publicly mourn the death of his sons?

#### The Death of Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi

To better understand Moses' unusual instructions, we must examine the Talmudic account of the passing of another prominent individual: Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi ('the Prince'). Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi was the second-century redactor of the Mishnah, and a pivotal religious and political figure. His influence was so great that he was universally referred to as Rebbi — "my teacher." No other name was needed to identify him.

Rabbi Yehudah's death was a traumatic event for the entire nation. The Talmud in Ketubot 104a relates the story of his final hours:

*When Rebbi became deathly ill, the scholars declared a public fast. His students and colleagues prayed for his recovery.*

*Rebbi's maid servant went up to the roof and pleaded: "On high, the [angels] want Rebbi [to join them]; and down below, they want Rebbi [to stay]. May it be Your will that those down below should prevail." But when she saw that Rebbi was suffering, she changed her prayer: "May it be Your will that those above will prevail."*

*The scholars however continued their constant prayers for Rebbi's recovery. The maid servant grabbed a jar and hurled it from the roof. The sudden crash startled the scholars and momentarily disrupted their prayers. Rebbi's soul promptly departed.*

*The sages asked Bar Kappara to investigate. He went and found Rebbi had passed away. Bar Kappara tore his garment and reported back:*

*"The angels and the mortals struggled over the Holy Ark. But the angels vanquished the mortals, and the Holy Ark has been captured."*

Why did the scholars and the maid servant disagree over whether to pray for Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi to live? Who was right? And why did Bar Kappara refer to his illustrious teacher as "the Holy Ark"?

#### The Benefits of Tzaddikim

The key to understanding this account is recognizing that there are two ways in which Torah scholars benefit the world. The first contribution is obvious to all: they disseminate Torah and provide guidance in the proper path.

In addition to these activities, however, there is an intrinsic quality based on the inner holiness of the Torah itself. Tzaddikim provide a hidden benefit, as they refine and elevate society by their very presence.

The Talmud in Sanhedrin 99b teaches that one who complains, "What do Torah scholars do for society? They only study for themselves" should be considered a heretic. Even if we do not see how scholars contribute to society, the intrinsic holiness of their Torah provides blessing and merit for all. Even the evil city of Sodom would have been spared had ten righteous people lived there, as God informed Abraham: "I will spare the entire region for their sake" (Gen. 18:26).

### **Bar Kappara's Message**

Now we may understand the story of Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi's death, and the disagreement between his disciples and his maid servant.

There are instances when it is proper to pray for the release of those gravely ill — when they are suffering greatly and there is no hope for their recovery (see Nedarim 40a). This, however, does not apply to a tzaddik. With regard to Torah scholars, the very existence of their Torah in the world is a hidden treasure that outweighs considerations of their own personal pain and discomfort. For these righteous individuals, it is proper to pray even for chayei sha'ah, for a limited extension of life. For this reason, the scholars continued praying for Rebbi, even though his illness was terminal.

At first, Rebbi's maid servant also prayed for his recovery, but her motivation was that her master should be able to continue to disseminate Torah. When she realized that his illness was so grave that he would no longer be able to teach, and that the only possible gain prayer could achieve was a temporary reprieve from death, she decided — mistakenly — that Rebbi no longer served a purpose in this world. Since he could no longer benefit this world and was wanted in the next, she prayed that the angels and the righteous souls in the next world would prevail.

Bar Kappara, however, recognized Rebbi's lofty inner qualities and his hidden benefit to the world. For this reason he referred to his teacher as "the Holy Ark." Bar Kappara wanted the people to recognize that this inner holiness was in fact Rebbi's primary benefit to the world. In this aspect, a tzaddik is like the Holy Ark. The Ark contained the original luchot (tablets) from Mount Sinai, and was a symbol for the Torah. Yet the Ark was covered with a heavy plate of gold; it was impossible to actually study from the luchot within. Thus the Holy Ark represents, not the Torah's practical benefit to the world, but its intrinsic holiness. From its location in the Temple's inner sanctum, it emanated holiness to the nation and the entire world.

We must appreciate Rebbi, Bar Kappara was saying, not just as the redactor of the Mishnah and a teacher of Torah, but primarily as a Holy Ark, as a receptacle of Torah and holiness.

### **Mourning for Nadav and Avihu**

Now we can understand why Aaron and his family were not permitted to publicly mourn for Nadav and Avihu. The benefit that the inner holiness of tzaddikim provides to the world is so great that it cannot be expressed in words. External displays of mourning cannot do justice to the magnitude of this loss. Public signs of mourning only express our sorrow at the cessation of their public activities.

Since the people were unable to truly appreciate the inner qualities of Nadav and Avihu, it was appropriate for the nation to publicly mourn the loss of their outward contributions to society. But Aaron, who recognized the lofty nature of his sons, realized that this terrible loss could never be conveyed in human language. Thus "Aaron was silent" (Lev. 10:3).

Moses instructed Aaron not to eulogize his sons even for their public activities, because this was a minor benefit compared to the value of their inner holiness. Since this hidden quality cannot be expressed in words, it was preferable for Aaron to remain silent.

Often we eulogize a great individual so that people will come to recognize the magnitude of the loss to society. In this instance, however, Moses explained that public mourning was unnecessary. Even without public eulogies, "The entire house of Israel will mourn the ones whom God has burned." The entire nation was aware of Nadav and Avihu's greatness, and would surely lament their absence.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Midbar Shur, pp. 332-336, 341-342)

[http://www.ravkooktorah.org/SHEMINI\\_67.htm](http://www.ravkooktorah.org/SHEMINI_67.htm)

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## When Weakness Becomes Strength (Shemini 5778)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.\*

Have you ever felt inadequate to a task you have been assigned or a job you have been given? Do you sometimes feel that other people have too high an estimate of your abilities? Has there been a moment when you felt like a faker, a fraud, and that at some time you would be found out and discovered to be the weak, fallible, imperfect human being you know in your heart you are?

If so, according to Rashi on this week's parsha, you are in very good company indeed. Here is the setting: The Mishkan, the Sanctuary, was finally complete. For seven days Moses had consecrated Aaron and his sons to serve as priests. Now the time had come for them to begin their service. Moses gives them various instructions. Then he says the following words to Aaron:

*"Come near to the altar and offer your sin offering and your burnt offering and make atonement for yourself and the people; sacrifice the offering that is for the people and make atonement for them, as the Lord has commanded." (Lev. 9:7)*

The sages were puzzled by the instruction, "Come near." This seems to imply that Aaron had until then kept a distance from the altar. Why so? Rashi gives the following explanation:

Aaron was ashamed and fearful of approaching the altar. Moses said to him: "Why are you ashamed? It was for this that you were chosen."

There is a name for this syndrome, coined in 1978 by two clinical psychologists, Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes. They called it the imposter syndrome.[1] People who suffer from it feel that they do not deserve the success they have achieved. They attribute it not to their effort and ability but to luck, or timing, or to the fact that they have deceived others into thinking that they are better than they actually are. It turns out to be surprisingly widespread, and particularly so among high achievers. Research has shown that around 40 per cent of successful people do not believe they deserve their success, and that as many as 70 per cent have felt this way at some time or other.

However, as one might imagine, Rashi is telling us something deeper. Aaron was not simply someone lacking in self-confidence. There was something specific that he must have had in mind on that day that he was inducted into the role of High Priest. For Aaron had been left in charge of the people while Moses was up the mountain receiving the Torah. That was when the sin of the Golden Calf took place.

Reading that narrative, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that it was Aaron's weakness that allowed it to happen. It was he who suggested that the people give him their gold ornaments, he who fashioned them into a calf, and he who built an altar before it (Ex. 32:1-6). When Moses saw the Golden Calf and challenged Aaron – "What did these people do to you, that you brought upon them this great sin?" – he replied, evasively, "They gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!"

This was a man profoundly (and rightly) uncomfortable with his role in one of the most disastrous episodes in the Torah, and now he was being called to atone not only for himself but for the entire people. Was this not hypocrisy? Was he not himself a sinner? How could he stand before God and the people and assume the role of the holiest of men? No wonder he felt like an imposter and was ashamed and fearful of approaching the altar.

Moses, however, did not simply say something that would boost his self-confidence. He said something much more radical and life-changing: "It was for this that you were chosen." The task of a High Priest is to atone for people's sins. It was his role, on Yom Kippur, to confess his wrongs and failings, then those of his household, then those of the people as a whole (Lev. 16:11-17). It was his responsibility to plead for forgiveness.

"That," implied Moses, "is why you were chosen. You know what sin is like. You know what it is to feel guilt. You more than anyone else understand the need for repentance and atonement. You have felt the cry of your soul to be cleansed, purified and wiped free of the stain of transgression. What you think of as your greatest weakness will become, in this role you are about to assume, your greatest strength."

How did Moses know this? Because he had experienced something similar himself. When God told him to confront Pharaoh and lead the Israelites to freedom, he repeatedly insisted that he could not do so. Reread his response to God's call to lead the Israelites out of Egypt (Ex. chapters 3-4), and they sound like someone radically convinced of his inadequacies. "Who am I?" "They won't believe in me." Above all, he kept repeating that he could not speak before a crowd, something absolutely necessary in a leader. He was not an orator. He did not have the voice of command:

Then Moses said to the Lord, "Please, my Lord, I am not a man of words, not yesterday, not the day before and not since You have spoken to Your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." (Ex. 4:10) Moses said to the Lord, "Look, the Israelites do not listen to me. How then will Pharaoh listen to me? Besides, I have uncircumcised lips." (Ex. 6:12).

Moses had a speech defect. To him that was a supreme disqualification from being a mouthpiece for the Divine word. What he did not yet understand is that this was one of the reasons God chose him. When Moses spoke the words of God, people knew he was not speaking his own words in his own voice. Someone else was speaking through him. This seems to have been the case for Isaiah and Jeremiah, both of whom were doubtful of their ability to speak and who became among the most eloquent of prophets.[2]

The people who can sway crowds with their oratory are generally speaking not prophets. Often they are, or become, dictators and tyrants. They use their power of speech to acquire more dangerous forms of power. God does not choose people who speak with their own voice, telling the crowds what they want to hear. He chooses people who are fully aware of their inadequacies, who stammer literally or metaphorically, who speak not because they want to but because they have to, and who tell people what they do not want to hear, but what they must hear if they are to save themselves from catastrophe. What Moses thought was his greatest weakness was, in fact, one of his greatest strengths.

The point here is not a simple "I'm OK, You're OK" acceptance of weakness. That is not what Judaism is about. The point is the struggle. Moses and Aaron in their different ways had to wrestle with themselves. Moses was not a natural leader. Aaron was not a natural priest. Moses had to accept that one of his most important qualifications was what nowadays we would call his low self image, but what, operating from a completely different mindset, the Torah calls his humility. Aaron had to understand that his own experience of sin and failure made him the ideal representative of a people conscious of their own sin and failure. Feelings of inadequacy – the imposter syndrome – can be bad news or good news depending on what you do with them. Do they lead you to depression and despair? Or do they lead you to work at your weaknesses and turn them into strengths?

The key, according to Rashi in this week's parsha, is the role Moses played at this critical juncture in Aaron's life. He had faith in Aaron even when Aaron lacked faith in himself. That is the role God Himself played, more than once, in Moses' life. And that is the role God plays in all our lives if we are truly open to Him. I have often said that the mystery at the heart of Judaism is not our faith in God. It is God's faith in us.

This then is the life-changing idea: what we think of as our greatest weakness can become, if we wrestle with it, our greatest strength. Think of those who have suffered tragedy and then devote their lives to alleviating the suffering of others. Think of those who, conscious of their failings, use that consciousness to help others overcome their own sense of failure.

What makes Tanakh so special is its total candour about humanity. Its heroes –Moses, Aaron, Isaiah, Jeremiah – all knew times when they felt like failures, "imposters." They had their moments of dark despair. But they kept going. They refused to be defeated. They knew that a sense of inadequacy can bring us closer to God, as King David said: "My sacrifice [i.e. what I bring as an offering to You] O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise" (Ps. 51:19).

Better by far to know you are imperfect than to believe you are perfect. God loves us and believes in us despite, and sometimes because of, our imperfections. Our weaknesses make us human; wrestling with them makes us strong.

Shabbat shalom.

## FOOTNOTES:

[1] Pauline Clance and Suzanne Ament Imes, "The Imposter Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention." *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice*, vol. 15, no. 3, 1978, pp. 241–247.

[2] There is a striking secular example: Winston Churchill had both a lisp and a stutter and though he fought against both, they persisted long into adulthood. Because of this, he had to think carefully in advance about his major speeches. He was fastidious in writing or dictating them beforehand, rewriting key phrases until the last moment. He used short words wherever possible, made dramatic use of pauses and silences, and developed an almost poetic use of rhythm. The result was not only that he became a great speaker. His speeches, especially over the radio during the Second World War, were a major factor in rousing the spirit of the nation. In the words of Edward Murrow he "mobilised the English language and sent it into battle."

\* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. See <https://rabbisacks.org/weakness-becomes-strength-shemini-5778/>

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## The Paradox of Eight

By Menachem Feldman\* © Chabad 2021

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.

### Seven represents the natural order

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.<sup>1</sup>

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,"<sup>2</sup> 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 Lrd appeared to all the people . . . And fire went forth from before the Lrd and consumed the burnt offering and the fats upon the altar, and all the people saw, sang praises, and fell upon their faces.*<sup>3</sup>

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.

### **The goal may seem elusive**

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.<sup>4</sup>

### **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: When Aaron is Superior to Moses**

By Rabbi Moshe Wisnfsky \*

*And it was on the eighth day, that Moses summoned Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel.*  
(Levitcus 9:1)

#### **On the eighth day, Moses summoned Aaron and his sons**

Due to the limitations of our finite human minds, we cannot attain ultimate Divine consciousness on our own.

G-d therefore revealed Divinity in such a way that we can grasp it, by giving us the Torah. Once this had been accomplished, the next step was to prepare the world to absorb the G-dliness that is inherent in the Torah, for without preparation on our part, Divine revelation cannot be absorbed into our being, and therefore cannot elevate us in any meaningful or lasting way.

G-d gave us the Torah through Moses, but Aaron was the one who made society receptive to G-dliness by inspiring the people to aspire to the spiritual life. It was therefore Aaron who completed the process of Divine revelation begun by Moses. The rites that Moses performed in the Tabernacle's installation rites did not reveal G-d's presence; only those that Aaron performed accomplished this.

We all desire to feel G-d's presence in our lives. In order for this to occur, we must imitate Aaron: “love peace and pursue peace; love your fellow creatures and bring them close to the Torah.”

— \* from Daily Wisdom #1

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**Covenant and Conversation**

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l**

**Reticence vs. Impetuosity**

It should have been a day of joy. The Israelites had completed the Mishkan, the Sanctuary. For seven days Moses had made preparations for its consecration.[1] Now on the eighth day – the first of Nissan – one year to the day since the Israelites had received their first command two weeks prior to the Exodus (Ex. 40:2) – the service of the Sanctuary was about to begin (Lev. 9:1 – 24). The Sages say that in Heaven it was the most joyous day since Creation (Megillah 10b).

But tragedy struck. The two elder sons of Aaron “offered a strange fire that had not been commanded” (Lev. 10:1) and the fire from heaven that should have consumed the sacrifices consumed them as well. They died. Aaron’s joy turned to mourning. “Vayidom Aharon” meaning, “And Aaron was silent.” (Lev. 10:3) The man who had been Moses’ spokesman could not longer speak. Words turned to ash in his mouth.

There is much in this episode that is hard to understand, much that has to do with the concept of holiness and the powerful energies it releases that, like nuclear power today, could be deadly dangerous if not properly used. But there is also a more human story about two approaches to leadership that still resonates with us today.

First there is the story about Aaron. We read about how Moses told him to begin his role as High Priest. “Moses [then] said to Aaron, ‘Approach the altar, and prepare your sin offering and burnt offering, thus atoning for you and the people. Then prepare the people’s offering to atone for them, as God has commanded’” (Lev. 9:7).

The Sages sensed a nuance in the words, “Approach the altar,” as if Aaron was standing at a distance from it, reluctant to come near. They said: “Initially Aaron was ashamed to come close. Moses said to him, ‘Do not be ashamed. This is what you have been chosen to do.’”[2]

Why was Aaron ashamed? Tradition gave two explanations, both brought by Nachmanides in his commentary to the Torah. The first is that Aaron was simply overwhelmed with trepidation at coming so close to the Divine Presence. The second is that Aaron, seeing the “horns” of the altar, was reminded of the Golden Calf, his great sin. How could he, who had played a key role in that terrible event, now take on the role of atoning for the

people’s sins? That surely demanded an innocence he no longer had. Moses had to remind him that it was precisely to atone for sins that the altar had been made; and the fact that he had been chosen by God to be High Priest was an unequivocal sign that he had been forgiven.

There is perhaps a third explanation, albeit less spiritual. Until now Aaron had been in all respects second to Moses. Yes, he had been at his side throughout, helping him speak and lead. But there is vast psychological difference between being second-in-command and being a leader in your own right. We probably all know examples of people who quite readily serve in an assisting capacity but who are terrified at the prospect of leading on their own.

Whichever explanation is true – and perhaps they all are – Aaron was reticent at taking on his new role, and Moses had to give him confidence. “This is what you have been chosen to do.”

The other story is the tragic one, of Aaron’s two sons, Nadav and Avihu, who “offered a strange fire, that had not been commanded.” The Sages offered several readings of this episode, all based on a close reading of the several places in the Torah where their death is referred to. Some said they had been drinking alcohol.[3] Others said that they were arrogant, holding themselves up above the community; this was the reason they had never married.[4]

Some say that they were guilty of giving a halachic ruling about the use of man-made fire, instead of asking their teacher Moses whether it was permitted (Eruvin 63a). Others say they were restless in the presence of Moses and Aaron. They said: when will these two old men die and we can lead the congregation? (Sanhedrin 52a)

However we read the episode, it seems clear that they were all too eager to exercise leadership. Carried away by their enthusiasm to play a part in the inauguration, they did something they had not been commanded to do. After all, had Moses not done something entirely on his own initiative, namely breaking the tablets when he came down the mountain and saw the Golden Calf? If he could act spontaneously, why not they?

They forgot the difference between a Priest and a Prophet. As we have seen in previous Covenant & Conversations, a Prophet lives and acts in time – in this moment that is unlike any other. A Priest acts and lives in eternity, by

following a set of rules that never change. Everything about “the holy,” the realm of the Priest, is precisely scripted in advance. The holy is the place where God, not man, decides.

Nadav and Avihu failed fully to understand that there are different kinds of leadership and they are not interchangeable. What is appropriate to one may be radically inappropriate to another. A judge is not a politician. A King is not a Prime Minister. A religious leader is not a celebrity seeking popularity. Confuse these roles and not only will you fail, you will also damage the very office you were chosen to hold.

The real contrast here, though, is the difference between Aaron and his two sons. They were, it seems, opposites. Aaron was over-cautious and had to be persuaded by Moses even to begin. Nadav and Avihu were not cautious enough. So keen were they to put their own stamp on the role of priesthood that their impetuosity was their downfall.

These are, perennially, the two challenges leaders must overcome. The first is the reluctance to lead. Why me? Why should I get involved? Why should I undertake the responsibility and all that comes with it – the high levels of stress, the sheer volume of work, and the neverending criticisms leaders always have to face? Besides which, there are other people better qualified and more suited than I am.

Even the greatest were reluctant to lead. Moses at the Burning Bush found reason after reason to show that he was not the man for the job. Isaiah and Jeremiah both felt inadequate. Summoned to lead, Jonah ran away. The challenge really is daunting. But when you feel as if you are being called to a task, if you know that the mission is necessary and important, then there is nothing you can do but say, Hineni, “Here I am.” (Ex. 3:4) In the words of a famous book title, you have to “feel the fear and do it anyway.”[5]

The other challenge is the polar opposite. There are some people who see themselves as rightful leaders. They are convinced that they can do it better than anyone else. We recall the famous remark of Israel’s first President, Chaim Weizmann, that he was head of a nation of a million presidents.

From a distance it seems so easy. Isn't it obvious that the leader should do X, not Y? Homo sapiens contains many back seat drivers who know better than those whose hands are on the steering wheel. Put them in a position of leadership and they can do great damage. Never having sat in the driver's seat, they have no idea of how many considerations have to be taken into account, how many voices of opposition have to be overcome, how difficult it is at one and the same time to cope with the pressures of events while not losing sight of long-term ideals and objectives. The late John F. Kennedy said that the worst shock on being elected President was that "when we got to the White House we discovered that things were as bad as we'd been saying they were." Nothing prepares you for the pressures of leadership when the stakes are high.

Overenthusiastic, overconfident leaders can do great harm. Before they became leaders they understood events through their own perspective. What they did not understand is that leadership involves relating to many perspectives, many interest groups and points of view. That does not mean that you try to satisfy everyone. Those who do so end up satisfying no one. But you have to consult and persuade. Sometimes you need to honour precedent and the traditions of a particular institution. You have to know exactly when to behave as your predecessors did, and when not to. All this calls for considered judgement, not wild enthusiasm in the heat of the moment.

Nadav and Avihu were surely great people. The trouble was that they believed they were great people. They were not like their father Aaron, who had to be persuaded to come close to the altar because of his sense of inadequacy. The one thing Nadav and Avihu lacked was a sense of their own inadequacy.[6]

To do anything great we have to be aware of these two temptations. One is the fear of greatness: who am I? The other is being convinced of your greatness: Who are they? I can do it better. We can do great things if (a) the task matters more than the person, (b) we are willing to do our best without thinking ourselves superior to others, and (c) we are willing to take advice, the thing Nadav and Avihu failed to do.

People do not become leaders because they are great. They become great because they are willing to serve as leaders. It does not matter that we think ourselves inadequate. Moses did. So did Aaron. What matters is the willingness, when challenge calls, to say, Hineni, "Here I am."

[1] As described in Exodus 40.

[2] Rashi to Lev. 9:7, quoting Sifra.

[3] Vayikra Rabbah 12:1; Ramban to Lev. 10:9.

[4] Vayikra Rabbah 20:10.

[5] Susan Jeffers, *Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway*, Ballantine Books, 2006.

[6] The composer Berlioz once said of a young musician: "He knows everything. The one thing he lacks is inexperience."

### Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed (the two sons of Aaron) and they died before the Lord" (Leviticus 10:2) The celebration of the dedication of the Sanctuary, Aaron's greatest triumph, turned tragedy. And one of the deepest Biblical mysteries is the reason why God Himself sent down a fire to consume them. Why?

The Midrash (VaYikrah Rabbah 12,1) attempts to provide an explanation:

"It seems impossible to understand why God would have caused them to die. And then comes the explanation in the verse which appears immediately after this incident: 'And the Lord said to Aaron saying, do not drink wine or mead, neither you nor your sons with you, when you enter into the Tent of Meeting so that you do not die. It is an eternal statute for your generations so that you may distinguish between the holy and the profane, between the impure and the pure'"

Apparently the Midrash is teaching that Nadav and Avihu were given this capital punishment because they had brought a fire unto God which had not been commanded while having become intoxicated with wine. From this perspective, wine – which removes the ability of the individual to distinguish between the Holy and the profane, between the pure and the impure – can lead to evil action and can bring about tragic consequences. And indeed at least according to one Rabbi Meir's view in the Talmud (B.T. Sanhedrin 70A, 70B), "The fruit from which Adam ate was the fruit of the vine because there is nothing which brings greater woe to the individual than wine". And of course it was Noah's planting of the vineyards which caused him to become drunk; The Midrash even goes so far as to suggest that Satan was Noah's partner and convinced him to plant a vineyard and drink from its fruit.

At the same time however we have just concluded the festival of Passover who's first Seder night is punctuated by four cups of the wine which symbolizes redemption. The Talmud goes on to teach "There is no joy without wine since 'wine gladdens the heart of humanity'" (B.T. Pesahim 109A). And further enjoins that we 'Remember (the Sabbath day) on wine' both at the inception of the Sabbath day by means of the Kiddush and at the closing of the Sabbath day by means of Havdallah. Is it not strange that the very wine which has the capability of causing forgetfulness and debauchery drunkenness can also be used as a means towards understanding and distinguishing. After all the very reference to Havdallah (separation between the Holy and the profane) is placed in the blessing in which we ask God to provide us with understanding and the ability to distinguish. In the words of our Sages, "If there is no knowledge how is it possible to distinguish between night and day, the Sabbath and the rest of the week, the holy

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and the profane. And the blessing of Havdallah is specifically recited over wine!

The Talmud links wine with the hebrew word Tirosh which is usually translated as grape; the hebrew Rosh means head and the hebrew Rash means poverty. If the individual who drinks the wine has merit, he will become a head; if not he will become a pauper. Wine therefore can lead the individual in two very opposite and even antithetical directions. It depends on the individual drinking the wine.

Maimonides, who first establishes the fact that the joy of the festival must be expressed through meat and wine, goes on to distinguish between drunken frivolity and joyous festivity "Drunkenness and much frivolity and levity is not rejoicing but is foolish hooliganism". We were not commanded to be foolish hooligans but rather to be joyous servant in the service of the creator of all things. The Bible even states that "curses will come upon us because 'you did not serve the Lord your God in joyousness and good heartedness". (Maimonides Chapter 6 of Laws of the Festival Law 20)

And later on, at the end of his Laws of the Lulav (8:15) "the joy with which the individual must rejoice is by means of the doing of the commandments and loving the Lord; such joy is a great act of divine service".

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik magnificently explains that the more energy the human being expends, the greater will be the sanctity and the deeper will be the joy. Ordinary juice is extracted from the fruit merely by squeezing it, wine is produced by the vine only by a long and arduous process, and therefore wine demands a separate and unique blessing. Apparently Nadav and Avihu, at least according to the Midrash we cited previously, went into the Tent of Meeting of the Sanctuary having already been intoxicated "You shall not drink wine or mead when you come into the Tent of Meeting" (VaYikrah Rabbah 12,1) The Sabbath wine on the other hand is a very different experience. We are commanded to "make ( Laasot)" the Sabbath, and when we hold aloft the wine goblet of Havdallah it is after we have spent at least most of Friday in preparation for the holy day. Wine which is drunk before one has expended energy and accomplished an ideal will lead to drunkenness; only wine which comes to express an inerstate of sanctity and accomplishment as a result of successful human effort will lead to great joy. In the words of one of my great teachers Rav Poleyoff: "If you are empty inside and expect the wine to put in the joy, the wine will only lead to forgetfulness and drunkenness; but if you are filled inside with a deep sense of self worth and accomplishment – and you see the wine as an expression of your own state of human happiness – then the wine will lead to true rejoicing, sanctity and remembrance of the Divine.

There are some parshios that seem to have little "luck". One such parsha is Parshas Shmini, which usually follows Pesach, making it feel very anticlimactic - sort of a side note to days of such import. The beginning of the parsha, which deals with korbanos, also does not ignite much interest. But this is the most profound moment in the history of Hashem's bond with Klal Yisroel. After building the parts of the Mishkan, erecting the structure and spending seven days offering sacrifices, on the eighth day the Divine Presence finally descends on the Mishkan to become a permanent presence in the Jewish nation.

The structure of this sequence of events is not seen as an "eight day" enterprise, rather it is a unit of seven days followed by an "eight day". It is as if there are two phases need to bring about the presence of the "Shechina".

Let us point to two parallels. First, in the classic primer for avodas Hashem, the Mesilas Yesharim, The Ramchal describes all the rungs in the ladder of avodas Hashem. At each step, he describes in detail "the rung" itself, the ways in which one acquires it, and how one stays away from pitfalls. When he comes to the last rung, i.e. kedusha, there is a remarkable change. He starts by saying that kedusha is a twofold entity; it starts with human endeavor, but ends with a Divine bestowal of that kedusha.

Second, the Rambam, in a different frame, has a very similar concept. In chapter seven of Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah he describes the development of a navi. He discusses all of the character traits that he must develop in himself, and if done properly, Ruach Hakodesh is immediately bestowed upon him (halacha 1.) However, this is still not nevuah. After further preparation he waits for the Divine Presence, which is nevuah, which may or may not happen (halacha 5.)

In both the Ramchal and Rambam we find the same structure of a person's avodas Hashem: many rungs that depend solely on man's avodah, followed by the final step which is a display of Hashem's participation [though there seems to be somewhat of a disagreement whether kedusha or nevuah is that last rung.]

The reason for this two stage reality is that it is up to a person to develop his own character and thus make himself worthy of bearing the Divine Presence. But the "Divine Presence" is the "other", and I cannot force it to come, no matter what I do.

This same dichotomy also is what distinguished the seven days from the eighth day. Seven days represent the human effort to be fully mekadesh oneself, but that by itself is not the Divine Presence. The Divine Presence is marked by the acceptance of the sacrifices

by Hashem, expressed as the fire coming down and consuming the sacrifices. This is analogous to when I present a gift to a loved one - I can put all of my effort into making the gift as beautiful and meaningful as possible, but it is up to the other person to accept the gift and thus "complete the circuit".

Perhaps this was the reason that Aharon was so reluctant to perform his duties, because of what he felt to be his character shortcomings [i.e. the sin of the golden calf.] Had this avodah been presented as just an obligation, he would not have resisted. After all, no one has the right to demur at doing what he is supposed to do simply because he feels he is not a big enough tzaddik! Rather, Aharon's protest was that if the goal of that day's avodah was to have Hashem accept the sacrifices and show how pleased He is with us, Aharon felt fearful that his shortcomings would interfere.

Is this second phase of kedusha / nevuah totally passive, or does it require something of us? Let us go back to the analogy of a gift to a person whose closeness we desire. It is important that gift be as nice as can be. But if I present it to the other person as a demand or imposition, i.e. "look at how I'm treating you, you have no choice but to be my friend", it is a turnoff for the other person. The most important ingredient for the gift to be accepted is an air of humility and an expression that it is my profoundest hope that you deem me fit to be close to you. One cannot "bully" his way into Hashem's presence.

The Chozeh of Lublin [also quoted in the name of the Ba'al Shem Tov] expressed this most succinctly in the words of Chazal, "Moshe told [Aharon], 'why are you embarrassed [to bring the sacrifice], for you have been chosen to do so [lekach nivcharta]'" The Chozeh reads this as, "you have been chosen for this very reason [lekach nivcharta]", i.e. your humility and lack of a sense of entitlement!

The totality of avodas Hashem thus requires of us two, almost opposite, approaches. The first is an "im ain ani li mi li" attitude, i.e. that everything stands on my, and only on my, efforts; combined with an extraordinary humility of "ul'k'she'ani latzmi mah ani". Then, and only then, do we merit that the Shechina "resides on our handiwork."

#### OTS Dvar Torah

#### A Fire That Consumes

#### Rabbi Ronen Ben David

Where does the desire to cut corners come from? How can we channel our positive enthusiasm and good intentions, and not let them devolve into a fiery ever-turning sword?

We all want things to go well. We are all imbued with a deep faith and desire to truly reach goodness. This is the main reason that every so often, we gird our loins and go above and beyond to do good in the world, but it is also the very root of our passivism. When

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goodness tarries, our natural tendency is to become absorbed in the mundane and flood our minds with desperate thoughts. So what can we do?

Do we sprint forward fervently, or stand still in complete frustration?

As in any other issue tied to Jewish thought, the key words here are balance and process. By yearning for goodness, we create a general purpose for our lives, but the path to that goodness is paved with obstacles. Like someone embarking on a journey who is shown how the journey will end, everything seems plain and simple at first. It is only when people get going that they discover how many rocks, dilemmas and thorns stand in their path. Remembering the finishing point gives us the strength that prevents us from breaking down when facing those cliffs and crags.

Yet there are those who are short on time. There are those who feel that big goals can be achieved fast, in the "here and now". We encounter such people in various settings in our lives, and almost always, we are able to say, right off the bat, that the attempt to cut corners will end in disaster. It does not work, even if we are properly and thoroughly motivated. Rabbi Kook teaches us that in ideological matters, you can't cut corners, because doing so would always mean that we'd have to categorically reject what other people think. He explains that in order to fulfill a great objective, you need to have an candid dialog, even if the other person's views differ from your own, and even if you think (mistakenly) that you know the truth, or at least that truth is on your side. It turns out that truth is much more nuanced. It's hardly black and white. Moreover, in general, those who try to cut corners are also those who are most likely to feel frustrated and hurt when they fail to achieve their goals. This holds true for all ideologies, be they religious, liberal, nationalist, or humanist. They apply to the lives of individuals, to the life of the nation, and to the entire world.

We find a resounding expression of the desire to cut corners in our Parasha: Moses and Aaron then went inside the Tent of Meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people; and the Glory of the Hashem appeared to all the people.

Fire came forth from before Hashem and consumed the burnt offering and the fat parts on the altar. And all the people saw, and shouted, and fell on their faces. Now Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu each took his fire pan, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered before Hashem a strange fire, which He had not enjoined upon them. And fire came forth from Hashem and consumed them; thus they died before Hashem. Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what Hashem meant when He said: Through those near to Me I show Myself

holy, And gain glory before all the people.” And Aaron was silent.

For Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of the Chabad Hassidic movement, as well as other great Hassidic personalities, the repetition of the idea of the “fire going out” conveyed a message with critical importance for generations to come. He proposed that Nadab and Avihu weren’t sinners at all. They were just trying to be ahead of their time. The fire of Hashem will go out and consume a sacrifice that Hashem desires, though that same fire can also consume the most righteous of people. The fire illuminates and warms the world, “so that it might be acceptable in his behalf to atone for it”, but it is also a “consuming fire”. Aaron’s two sons were full of positive enthusiasm, but this kind of fervor, when neglecting to take the entire process into consideration, reached without going through any process, can turn into the fervor of an “ever-turning sword”.

In light of this, we can now understand Moses’ words of consolation to Aaron: they truly are close, he says, but when you want to redeem the entire people and not just the righteous, a fire comes out, and it even consumes those who are righteous in their day.

If we don’t want to err by rushing into things, driven by an extreme and unbalanced Messianic fervor that could, God forbid, consume anyone who doesn’t agree with us, we must commit to the process. If we don’t want to rush in, only to be disappointed and end up feeling horrible, we must commit to the process. Even when redemption is at our doorstep, we must all etch the concept of following a process deep into our minds. The redemption process isn’t something that happens in one fell swoop. It’s the result of a deep and candid dialog in which each side truly recognizes and accepts the other, understanding that both were created in the image of God, and that both sides have something to contribute. This kind of dialog ultimately produces a bold connection free of unneeded polemics. Instead of using divisive shortcuts akin to a “foreign fire”, it behooves us to operate confidently and cautiously, following the right process, so that the “consuming fire” can become “a perpetual fire that keeps burning on the altar and is never extinguished.”

#### Approaching God (and living to tell the tale) Miriam Gedwiser

Parashat Shemini is famous for the dramatic story of Aharon’s sons Nadav and Avihu, their “strange fire” which God had not commanded, and their precipitous demise. The haftarah selection for the week, the story of “peretz Uzah” (II Sam. 6:1-19), contains what seems to be a companion story of the precipitous death of Uzah, who reached out to steady the aron, the ark of the covenant, while David was having it repatriated. At first glance, both stories are object lessons in what happens if

you get too close to God’s holy objects without following proper protocol: the people who do so (Nadav and Avihu; Uzzah) get zapped. But I believe that a closer look at the details of the haftarah, including the end of Chapter 6 (verses 20-24) that are not included in the haftarah, complicates this picture and provides not just an object lesson of what not to do, but perhaps a model of the right way for a layperson to approach God.

After the death of Uzzah, “David was afraid of the LORD that day; he said, “How can I let the Ark of the LORD come to me?”” (II Sam 6:9). David diverted the aron elsewhere, but after seeing the blessings that came to its new guardians David decided to try again. The first, abortive processional involved festivities, but the second attempt is described with some new details: “David whirled with all his might (mekharker be-khol oz) before the LORD; David was girt with a linen ephod (hagur ephod bad)” (6:14). These two details may help us answer David’s initial worry of “how can the ark of the Lord come to me?”

First, David whirled with all his might. The word for might, oz, appears exactly twice in the book of Shmuel. The first is I Sam 2:10, where, after Hannah has delivered her long-prayed-for son, Shemuel, to the mishkan, she concludes her exultant prayer, “He will give strength unto His king (ve-yiten oz le-malko), And exalt the horn of His anointed.” After Hannah’s prayer, one can see the rest of the book of Shmuel as a winding and often difficult path to establish the kingship of which she prayed. The second and last appearance of oz in the book is in our story, as David whirls with all his might. Whatever David is doing, we have a hint that it is especially kingly.

Second, David is wearing a linen ephod. Two other people in Tanakh before David have worn an ephod using the same verb, h.g.r. In the book of Shemuel alef, Shmuel himself is described using the same three word phrase, hagur ephod bad (I Sam 2:18), as he serves the high priest Eili in the mishkan. (Indeed, that phrase appears only twice, regarding Shmuel and David, in all of Tanakh.) This connection raises some concerns, as we might be wary that David is trying to usurp the priesthood in addition to his kingship. This concern is only amplified if we know that the other person to wear, h.g.r., an ephod, is Aharon in parashat Tzav (8:7), in the days of consecration immediately preceding the dramatic Eighth day that occupies our parashah. (This is the only mention of an ephod in sefer Vayikra.)

Is David in danger of over-stepping his prescribed roles, much as Nadav and Avihu did? Here the episode at the end of the chapter, which is omitted from the haftarah, may prove instructive. While David was dancing vigorously, his wife “Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and whirling before the LORD; and she despised him for it (6:10).”

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When David returned home, they fought about it. Michal asked David sarcastically, ““Didn’t the king of Israel do himself honor today (mah nikhdad ha-yom)—exposing himself today in the sight of the slavegirls of his subjects, as one of the riffraff might expose himself?”” (6:20). David answered, ““It was before the LORD who chose me instead of your father and all his family and appointed me ruler over the LORD’s people Israel! I will dance before the LORD, and dishonor myself even more, and be low in my own esteem”” (6:21-22). David does not approach God with arrogance or presumption, but with self-effacement. David accepts personal dishonor as a price for honoring God, even as he recognizes (with his characteristic shrewdness) that this very act of self-effacement may bring him honor among his subjects, ““but among the slavegirls that you speak of I will be honored (imam ikavedah).””

David’s phrasing, imam ikavedah, recalls Moshe’s statement to Aharon in our parashah: ““This is what the LORD meant when He said: Through those near to Me I show Myself holy, And gain glory before all the people (ve-al penei kol ha-am ekaved)”” (10:3).

Moshe’s precise intentions are somewhat obscure, but the simple meaning of his last phrase seems to be that the terror of Nadav and Avihu’s deaths will generate a sense of awe for God among the people (see Ibn Ezra ad loc). There is another interpretation, however. Rashbam and Chizkuni understand the glory, kavod, that comes to God out of the incident to flow not directly from the deaths, but from Aharon’s reaction. In Rashbam’s words: “This is the glory of God’s presence (shechinah) – that he (Aharon) sees his sons dead and he desists from his mourning in the service of his creator.” Aharon demonstrates God’s glory by putting the Tabernacle service above his family concerns. This is perhaps similar to how David demonstrates God’s glory by displaying intense joy to the point of self-effacement.

On the surface level, the haftarah and the parashah are companion stories because of the parallel fates of Nadav and Avihu and of Uzzah. But perhaps there is another set of parallel characters: Aharon and David. Aharon, by following the precise script and choreography Moshe laid out, may approach God and welcome God’s glory (kavod, see, e.g., 9:24). So too David shows “how can the ark of the Lord come to me?” by putting God’s honor before his own.

But whereas Aharon’s approach was carefully choreographed, David’s is spontaneous, almost spastic if we listen to the words used to describe it – mefazes umekharker (6:16). Perhaps this is the difference between priests and kings. Although both Aharon and David wear an ephod, Aharon the priest must follow precise instructions and may not innovate – and his sons, who followed their passions for God’s service, ended up dead. For David the

king, innovation and intuition in the service of God are essential.

In our contemporary life we have ritual areas where the Aharon mode of extreme caution may be appropriate, and we have others that require David-like intuition and self-expression. May we be blessed with the wisdom to know which is which.

## OU Dvar Torah

### R'Baz and the Racham

#### Rabbi Eliyahu Safran

In categorizing kosher animals and fish, the Torah delineates the characteristics that make an animal or fish kosher. Does it chew its cud and have split hooves? Does it have fins and scales? So long as an animal or fish fits the criteria, it is considered kosher. The Torah does not list the names of specific animals or fish that “made the cut”, just the criteria. However, when it comes to birds, the Torah takes a very different approach.

Rather than list the avian characteristics that render a bird either kosher or non-kosher, the Torah lists twenty non-kosher species leaving every other species, by not being listed, to be considered kosher.

Among these twenty non-kosher species listed in Parashat Shemini, are the tinshemet, the ke'at, and the racham. The Talmud (Chulin 63a) cites Rav Yehuda who identifies the racham with the sherakrak. “Sherakrak.” Such a curious name. Rashi explains that the name is imitative in origin. It was given to the bird by its very distinctive call, sherak-rak.

The bird's call is so raucous and so recognizable that there are those who are convinced that it is the source not only of the bird's name but also of our word for a cry, shriek. Whether that etymology is accurate or not hardly takes away from the poetic (and auditory!) symmetry and satisfaction to be gotten from the explanation.

However, while the bird's name is understandably associated with shrieking, it is less clear why so raucous a sounding bird would also be known as the racham. “Racham” which is derived from the Hebrew term for compassion hardly seems like a logical or satisfying name for such a creature.

The Talmud, in its discussion, provides some connections but also leaves some questions,

Rabbi Yochanan says: Why is it called the racham? Because when the racham arrives, love/compassion [rachamim] comes to the world.... And we have a tradition that when it sits on the ground (Rashi – which is not its normal behavior) and whistles [shareik], [it is a sign that] Moshiach is coming, as it is stated: “I will whistle [eshrekah] for them and gather them in.” (Zechariah 10:8).

So here, the Talmud makes the connection more certain but doesn't speak to our question. What is the concern about this racham bird and disquieting squawk? How is it that this non-kosher bird evokes compassion in others and, most importantly, what is its connection to Moshiach?

My grandfather HaGaon Rav Bezalel Zev Shafran ZT'L (in Yalkut HaChanochi 30) addresses these questions and, as usual, brings a crystallin directness to his explanation. He begins his exploration of this cryptic Talmudic statement by establishing two premises. The first is centered on the Hebrew alphabet and its ascending order, from alef to tav.

We remember that the Hebrew alphabet is also a numbering system in which the numbers, along with the letters, rise in ascending order. The first letter, alef, represents the number one. While “one” may seem a meager presence, singular and unassuming it is, in fact, perfect in its unity and singularity. It is whole, complete, and perfect. Each subsequent letter/number following the alef suggests numbers divisible and complex, implying increasing disunity.

In this way, each letter derives its ultimate significance from its relation to the alef; the closer to alef the letter is, the closer to unity and wholeness. The further from alef, the greater the pirud, the greater the degree of disunity.

Just as one might expect, if in reading the alef-bet in ascending order we move from unity to disunity, the opposite is equally true. In reading the alef-bet in descending order (from tav to alef) we find ourselves moving from greatest disunity and multiplicity towards greater unity and singularity.

From tav, to shin to reish to kuf. At each step, we feel the draw of unity strengthening. The letter shin represents the beginning of this process, this march

## Likutei Divrei Torah

from disunity to unity. The greater the distance a letter stands in relation to the tav, the more its numerical value decreases and the pirud – disunity – diminishes until finally, we once again reach the alef and we once again find ourselves at unity and wholeness, at one.

Just as in the ascending alef, bet order, only the alef is the genuine unity without any disunity, likewise in the descending order from tav, shin, reish, kuf, there is no greater pirud than the tav, but from shin and on, the pirud consistently diminishes, one letter at a time.

My grandfather's second premise introduces Chazal's well-known comment that the Second Temple was destroyed as a direct result of baseless hatred (sin'at chinam). That is, internal strife, inner dissension and division – disunity – so pervaded the heart of the people that it was manifested in every aspect and facet of Jewish life, the personal, the communal, the ritual and the institutional.

So pervasive was the discord and disunity throughout the community that it felt like the norm. Recognizing the deep, existential damage such discord caused, my grandfather cries out for the urgent need for unity and alliance among all Jews and all its communities – then and now. Our redemption will only come about when the Jews form a single band [aguda achas]; only when we are unified. The lesson is clear, it is only if we unify and rid ourselves of the discord among us, that we can ready ourselves for the geula.

Having established these two premises, my grandfather then returns to the Talmud in Chulin. Understanding these two premises, we can now understand, my grandfather says, the word “racham.” In addition to being the name of a bird, it also denotes love, as in Psalm 18:2, Vayomar, erachemcha HaShem chizki – And he said, I will love You, HaShem, my Strength. Or, again, when Torah speaks of Yitzchak – v'yehehav Yitzchak, the Targum explains v'rachim.

It is here that my grandfather's insight comes into focus. Rather than expressing opposing concepts (unity versus disunity), the name sherakrak suggests closeness, unity, togetherness no less than racham! “Sherakrak” is composed of the letters shin, resh, and kuf, the second, third, and fourth letters of the Hebrew alphabet when read in descending order; that is, the

letters that represent the first three steps in the march from disunity toward unity!

“When the racham arrives, rachamim comes to the world!” When that march is completed, we will have arrived at unity!

It is clear. If the Jewish people would turn away from disunity and discord and move to connect with one another in love, fraternity, peace, and friendship, then God will show us an abundance of love, kindness, and compassion, and Moshiach will come.

“And we have a tradition that when it sits on the ground...” that is, when love pervades every sector of the Jewish people throughout the world, “...and shrakrak is whistled...” and the Jewish people bond and unify together with cords of love, without division or discord, then Moshiach will indeed come, and he will “whistle” to gather the Jewish people from their dispersion and bring them to the land of their forefathers!

In focusing on the Second Temple’s destruction, my grandfather’s text makes clear just how destructive disunity and unwarranted hatred really are to our people and community.

It is worthwhile that we build on his insight and look unflinchingly at the insights he makes clear. Here we can ask ourselves, exactly how destructive is the disunity and unwarranted hatred that tears at the fabric of our Jewish community? The Talmud, in Yoma (9), tells us that the First Temple was destroyed because that generation transgressed the three cardinal sins of idol worship, sexual immorality and murder.

So, how damaging is disunity and hatred? The generation punished for their transgression of the three cardinal sins was redeemed after seventy years, yet the generation of unwarranted hatred has yet to see its redemption.

Such is the deep destruction such feeling brings to our community! Because of them, we continue to wander.

When our family recently gathered on Zoom to celebrate the publication of the fourth edition of our grandfather’s She’elot U’tshuvot R’baz, my brother, Rabbi Bezalel Safran, explained this novel passage in our grandfather’s writings and added to it the following idea – when we

recite the Birkat HaChodesh, the Blessing of the New Month, we ask of God to grant us a new month filled with goodness, sustenance, love of Torah and fear of Heaven and so much more.

We then add a prayer beseeching God, “May He Who performed miracles for our ancestors and redeemed them from slavery to freedom, speedily redeem us and gather our dispersed from the four corners of the earth”. In other words, we pray for the ultimate redemption, for the geula, for Moshiach to come and herald all the good promised by our prophets. And then we add one more well-known phrase to the Mi She’asa Nisim; we turn to God and cry out with fervor, Chaveirim kol Yisrael – for all Israel are united in fellowship! All Jews are chaveirim.

As my grandfather explained, racham denotes love, fraternity, peace, togetherness. We pray for God to redeem us, to show His love and compassion to us. Our prayer can only be realized when love pervades every aspect of the Jewish people and Jewish life throughout the world. So, we proclaim, chaveirim kol Yisrael – we are all chaveirim! Now, we are saying, the geula can come.

Chaveirim kol Yisrael. May we be worthy of the fulfillment of this prayer. May we be worthy of redemption.

## Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet Shmini 5781

### In My Opinion COUNTING

#### Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

We are now in the midst of the period on the Jewish calendar when we are engaged in a daily countdown towards the holiday of Shavuot. This commandment of counting the days begins with the offering of the first new grain of the Pesach harvest and concludes with the new produce of the agricultural year in the temple in Jerusalem on the holiday of Shavuot.

Each of the 49 intervening days as well as the seven weeks that pass between the holidays is to be counted. There is a difference of opinion as to whether each day is a commandment by itself or rather the total of 49 days, when completed, also marks the fulfillment of the biblical commandment. It is clear, though, that the Torah is insistent on this count during the interim between these two major holidays of the Jewish calendar.

Now, the fact that the holiday of Shavuot marks the anniversary date of the Revelation at Sinai and the granting of the Torah to the Jewish people, it seems obvious that we should be counting towards a great event and doing so with anticipation and optimism. It is therefore strange that the count that we do make is, so to speak, a backward count – is counting the days that have passed and not counting the of days of glory and significance that are yet to come.

We should count on the first night that there are now 49 more days to come and every night thereafter naturally reduces that number by the number that has already passed. Instead, we count that it was day one or day two, etc. – days that have already passed and will never return.

Our great teacher Moshe in one of the chapters of Psalms that he authored, stated that we were endowed with the knowledge to count our days so that we may obtain for ourselves a heart of wisdom. Since the future is always unknown, the import of this lesson is that we should count the days that have already advanced as well as the present days to become wiser and better people.

Counting days that have passed automatically causes us to reflect on what was accomplished and what was left undone. We remember past accomplishments as well as past deficiencies. We have a certain perspective on the past that we are completely unable to have regarding the future. However, by contemplating our past and learning from our experiences, and gaining from our studies and knowledge, we can become wiser. And that wisdom once again will benefit us no matter what the future brings. Experiencing the past allows one to have a more balanced and sanguine approach to the future, unknown as it is and anxious as we may be regarding it.

Perhaps this is what King Solomon meant when he stated that what was is what will be – meaning that what was will help define, explain, and protect us from what will yet be in the unknown future.

I think that it is in this vein that the commandment of counting the days between these two major Jewish holidays was ordered upon us. Accepting the Torah in every generation and for every individual requires some degree of preparation – mental, emotional, moral, spiritual, and intellectual. Without such preparation it will be hard to maintain the values and lifestyle that the Torah stands for and demands from us.

This preparation can only be obtained by reviewing our past behavior, knowledge, and lessons of life. We are bidden to count backwards, so to speak, to be able to progress in a meaningful fashion towards the acceptance of Torah as the bedrock of our faith and lifestyle. It is this realization that the past weighs heavily upon us, whether we want it to or not, that both Moshe and King Solomon wish to impart to us in their immortal words. We all are aware of the dread that we have that the past will somehow escape us and that we will remain no longer human beings in the fullest sense of the word but rather shadows of our former selves... realizing what we could have been.

Counting values is therefore important and even though we are commanded to do so for only 49 days, mentally and spiritually it is a

year-round discipline that can only enhance our physical and spiritual lives.

Shabbat shalom

Berel Wein

### Weekly Parsha SHMINI 5781

#### Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

One of the more distinguishing life values which Judaism advocates is the type of food that a Jew eats. There are foods that Jews are commanded to eat such, as matzah on Pesach and continuing with Pesach, there are also forbidden foods such as leavened bread. The laws and customs regarding kosher food are numerous and complex. Perhaps no other area of Jewish life, except for the Sabbath and its laws, has evoked, over the centuries, so much scholarship and divergence of opinions regarding Halacha and practice.

There are clear lines that establish the basic rules regarding kosher food. There have been many explanations and reasons given regarding this facet of Jewish life, concerning permissible and forbidden foods. These reasons range from the mysteries of kabalistic thought to the seemingly practical ideas of good health and proper diet. But, even after all the rational explanations have been expounded upon, the laws of kosher food remain one of the great commandments of the Torah for which we have no completely rational explanation. Therefore, Kashrut belongs in the realm of Chukim -- laws and commandments that we follow simply because that is will, so to speak, of our Creator. Our limited capacity of human understanding makes for the mystery behind the commandment. But the commandment itself stands, and it is binding for whatever reason we may or may not assign to it and its performance.

One thing is crystal-clear and all Jewish history attests to this commandment. The consumption of only kosher food has been one of the main contributors to the survival of Judaism and the Jewish people over the ages. It has created the necessary boundary that delineates us and our faith. By so doing, it has given us a deep realization that being a Jew relates also to the body and internal organs of a person, and not only the cerebral notion of religion that many people have.

It is very important to be a good Jew in heart and mind. But for all the unknown and unseen reasons that lie behind the survival of the Jewish people over the millennia against all odds, it is just as important, if not even more so, to be a good Jew in one's stomach. Difficulties in maintaining proper standards in kosher food and the abandonment by many secular Jews of the entire concept of kosher food, has inevitably contributed the rates of assimilation and intermarriage of their succeeding generations. People who can eat together eventually realize they can socialize together, and the rest is obvious.

One of the great blessings of our modern time is the abundance of all types of kosher food. In Israel and in the United States there is little challenge left in having to observe the commandments of kosher food. Nevertheless, a large section of the Jewish people still has not broken the bad habit of past generations, and we are faced with numerous crises of disappointments in Jewish national life. As the Torah is our friend and protector, we should always be aware of its demands. It is for our own sake that we should do so.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

### Reticence vs. Impetuosity (Shemini 5781)

*Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.*

It should have been a day of joy. The Israelites had completed the Mishkan, the Sanctuary. For seven days Moses had made preparations for its consecration.[1] Now on the eighth day – the first of Nissan – one year to the day since the Israelites had received their first command two

weeks prior to the Exodus (Ex. 40:2) – the service of the Sanctuary was about to begin (Lev. 9:1 – 24). The Sages say that in Heaven it was the most joyous day since Creation (Megillah 10b).

But tragedy struck. The two elder sons of Aaron “offered a strange fire that had not been commanded” (Lev. 10:1) and the fire from heaven that should have consumed the sacrifices consumed them as well. They died. Aaron’s joy turned to mourning. “Vayidom Aharon” meaning, “And Aaron was silent.” (Lev. 10:3) The man who had been Moses’ spokesman could not longer speak. Words turned to ash in his mouth.

There is much in this episode that is hard to understand, much that has to do with the concept of holiness and the powerful energies it releases that, like nuclear power today, could be deadly dangerous if not properly used. But there is also a more human story about two approaches to leadership that still resonates with us today.

First there is the story about Aaron. We read about how Moses told him to begin his role as High Priest. “Moses [then] said to Aaron, ‘Approach the altar, and prepare your sin offering and burnt offering, thus atoning for you and the people. Then prepare the people’s offering to atone for them, as God has commanded’” (Lev. 9:7).

The Sages sensed a nuance in the words, “Approach the altar,” as if Aaron was standing at a distance from it, reluctant to come near. They said: “Initially Aaron was ashamed to come close. Moses said to him, ‘Do not be ashamed. This is what you have been chosen to do.’”[2]

Why was Aaron ashamed? Tradition gave two explanations, both brought by Nachmanides in his commentary to the Torah. The first is that Aaron was simply overwhelmed with trepidation at coming so close to the Divine Presence. The second is that Aaron, seeing the “horns” of the altar, was reminded of the Golden Calf, his great sin. How could he, who had played a key role in that terrible event, now take on the role of atoning for the people’s sins? That surely demanded an innocence he no longer had. Moses had to remind him that it was precisely to atone for sins that the altar had been made; and the fact that he had been chosen by God to be High Priest was an unequivocal sign that he had been forgiven.

There is perhaps a third explanation, albeit less spiritual. Until now Aaron had been in all respects second to Moses. Yes, he had been at his side throughout, helping him speak and lead. But there is vast psychological difference between being second-in-command and being a leader in your own right. We probably all know examples of people who quite readily serve in an assisting capacity but who are terrified at the prospect of leading on their own.

Whichever explanation is true – and perhaps they all are – Aaron was reticent at taking on his new role, and Moses had to give him confidence. “This is what you have been chosen to do.”

The other story is the tragic one, of Aaron’s two sons, Nadav and Avihu, who “offered a strange fire, that had not been commanded.” The Sages offered several readings of this episode, all based on a close reading of the several places in the Torah where their death is referred to. Some said they had been drinking alcohol.[3] Others said that they were arrogant, holding themselves up above the community; this was the reason they had never married.[4]

Some say that they were guilty of giving a halachic ruling about the use of man-made fire, instead of asking their teacher Moses whether it was permitted (Eruvin 63a). Others say they were restless in the presence of Moses and Aaron. They said: when will these two old men die and we can lead the congregation? (Sanhedrin 52a)

However we read the episode, it seems clear that they were all too eager to exercise leadership. Carried away by their enthusiasm to play a part in the inauguration, they did something they had not been commanded to do. After all, had Moses not done something entirely on his own initiative, namely breaking the tablets when he came down the mountain and saw the Golden Calf? If he could act spontaneously, why not they?

They forgot the difference between a Priest and a Prophet. As we have seen in previous Covenant & Conversations, a Prophet lives and acts in time – in this moment that is unlike any other. A Priest acts and lives in eternity, by following a set of rules that never change. Everything about

“the holy,” the realm of the Priest, is precisely scripted in advance. The holy is the place where God, not man, decides.

Nadav and Avihu failed fully to understand that there are different kinds of leadership and they are not interchangeable. What is appropriate to one may be radically inappropriate to another. A judge is not a politician. A King is not a Prime Minister. A religious leader is not a celebrity seeking popularity. Confuse these roles and not only will you fail, you will also damage the very office you were chosen to hold.

The real contrast here, though, is the difference between Aaron and his two sons. They were, it seems, opposites. Aaron was over-cautious and had to be persuaded by Moses even to begin. Nadav and Avihu were not cautious enough. So keen were they to put their own stamp on the role of priesthood that their impetuosity was their downfall.

These are, perennially, the two challenges leaders must overcome. The first is the reluctance to lead. Why me? Why should I get involved? Why should I undertake the responsibility and all that comes with it – the high levels of stress, the sheer volume of work, and the neverending criticisms leaders always have to face? Besides which, there are other people better qualified and more suited than I am.

Even the greatest were reluctant to lead. Moses at the Burning Bush found reason after reason to show that he was not the man for the job. Isaiah and Jeremiah both felt inadequate. Summoned to lead, Jonah ran away. The challenge really is daunting. But when you feel as if you are being called to a task, if you know that the mission is necessary and important, then there is nothing you can do but say, Hineni, “Here I am.” (Ex. 3:4) In the words of a famous book title, you have to “feel the fear and do it anyway.”[5]

The other challenge is the polar opposite. There are some people who see themselves as rightful leaders. They are convinced that they can do it better than anyone else. We recall the famous remark of Israel’s first President, Chaim Weizmann, that he was head of a nation of a million presidents.

From a distance it seems so easy. Isn’t it obvious that the leader should do X, not Y? Homo sapiens contains many back seat drivers who know better than those whose hands are on the steering wheel. Put them in a position of leadership and they can do great damage. Never having sat in the driver’s seat, they have no idea of how many considerations have to be taken into account, how many voices of opposition have to be overcome, how difficult it is at one and the same time to cope with the pressures of events while not losing sight of long-term ideals and objectives. The late John F. Kennedy said that the worst shock on being elected President was that “when we got to the White House we discovered that things were as bad as we’d been saying they were.” Nothing prepares you for the pressures of leadership when the stakes are high.

Overenthusiastic, overconfident leaders can do great harm. Before they became leaders they understood events through their own perspective. What they did not understand is that leadership involves relating to many perspectives, many interest groups and points of view. That does not mean that you try to satisfy everyone. Those who do so end up satisfying no one. But you have to consult and persuade. Sometimes you need to honour precedent and the traditions of a particular institution. You have to know exactly when to behave as your predecessors did, and when not to. All this calls for considered judgement, not wild enthusiasm in the heat of the moment.

Nadav and Avihu were surely great people. The trouble was that they believed they were great people. They were not like their father Aaron, who had to be persuaded to come close to the altar because of his sense of inadequacy. The one thing Nadav and Avihu lacked was a sense of their own inadequacy.[6]

To do anything great we have to be aware of these two temptations. One is the fear of greatness: who am I? The other is being convinced of your greatness: Who are they? I can do it better. We can do great things if (a) the task matters more than the person, (b) we are willing to do our best without thinking ourselves superior to others, and (c) we are willing to take advice, the thing Nadav and Avihu failed to do.

People do not become leaders because they are great. They become great because they are willing to serve as leaders. It does not matter that we think ourselves inadequate. Moses did. So did Aaron. What matters is the willingness, when challenge calls, to say, Hineni, "Here I am."

### Parshat Shemini (Leviticus 9:1 – 11:47)

By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed (the two sons of Aaron) and they died before the Lord" (Leviticus 10:2) the celebration of the dedication of the Sanctuary . Aaron's greatest triumphs turned tragedy. And one of the deepest Biblical mysteries is the reason why God Himself sent down a fire to consume them. Why?

The Midrash (VaYikrah Rabbah 12,1) attempts to provide an explanation:

"It seems impossible to understand why God would have caused them to die. And then comes the explanation in the verse which appears immediately after this incident ; 'And the Lord said to Aaron saying, do not drink wine or mead, neither you nor your sons with you, when you enter into the Tent of Meeting so that you do not die. It is an eternal statutes for your generations so that you may distinguish between the holy and the profane, between the impure and the pure'"

Apparently the Midrash is teaching that Nadav and Avihu were given this capital punishment because they had brought a fire unto God which had not been commanded while having become intoxicated with wine. From this perspective, wine – which removes the ability of the individual to distinguish between the Holy and the profane, between the pure and the impure – can lead to evil action and can bring about tragic consequences. And indeed at least according to one Rabbi Meir's view in the Talmud (B.T. Sanhedrin 70A, 70B), "The fruit from which Adam ate was the fruit of the vine because there is nothing which brings greater woe to the individual than wine". And of course it was Noah's planting of the vineyards which caused him to become drunk; The Midrash even goes so far as to suggest that Satan was Noah's partner and convinced him to plant a vineyard and drink from its fruit.

At the same time however we have just concluded the festival of Passover who's first Seder night is punctuated by four cups of the wine which symbolizes redemption. The Talmud goes on to teach "There is no joy without wine since 'wine gladdens the heart of humanity'"(B.T. Pesahim 109A). And further enjoins that we 'Remember (the Sabbath day) on wine' both at the inception of the Sabbath day by means of the Kiddush and at the closing of the Sabbath day by means of Havdallah. Is it not strange that the very wine which has the capability of causing forgetfulness and debauchery drunkenness can also be used as a means towards understanding and distinguishing. After all the very reference to Havdallah (separation between the Holy and the profane) is placed in the blessing in which we ask God to provide us with understanding and the ability to distinguish. In the words of our Sages, "If there is no knowledge how is it possible to distinguish between night and day, the Sabbath and the rest of the week, the holy and the profane. And the blessing of Havdallah is specifically recited over wine!

The Talmud links wine with the hebrew word Tirosh which is usually translated as grape; the hebrew Rosh means head and the hebrew Rash means poverty. If the individual who drinks the wine has merit, he will become a head; if not he will become a pauper. Wine therefore can lead the individual in two very opposite and even antithetical directions. It depends on the individual drinking the wine.

Maimonides, who first establishes the fact that the joy of the festival must be expressed through meat and wine, goes on to distinguish between drunken frivolity and joyous festivity "Drunkenness and much frivolity and levity is not rejoicing but is foolish hooliganism". We were not commanded to be foolish hooligans but rather to be joyous servant in the service of the creator of all things. The Bible even states that "curses will come upon us because 'you did not serve the Lord your God in joyousness and good heartedness".(Maimonides Chapter 6 of Laws of the Festival Law 20)

And later on, at the end of his Laws of the Lulav (8:15) "the joy with which the individual must rejoice is by means of the doing of the

commandments and loving the Lord; such joy is a great act of divine service".

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik magnificently explains that the more energy the human being expends, the greater will be the sanctity and the deeper will be the joy. Ordinary juice is extracted from the fruit merely by squeezing it, wine is produced by the vine only by a long and arduous process, and therefore wine demands a separate and unique blessing. Apparently Nadav and Avihu, at least according to the Midrash we cited previously, went into the Tent of Meeting of the Sanctuary having already been intoxicated "You shall not drink wine or mead when you come into the Tent of Meeting" (VaYikrah Rabbah 12,1 ) The Sabbath wine on the other hand is a very different experience. We are commanded to "make ( Laasot)" the Sabbath, and when we hold aloft the wine goblet of Havdallah it is after we have spent at least most of Friday in preparation for the holy day. Wine which is drunk before one has expended energy and accomplished an ideal will lead to drunkenness; only wine which comes to express an inerstate of sanctity and accomplishment as a result of successful human effort will lead to great joy. In the words of one of my great teachers Rav Poleyoff : If you are empty inside and expect the wine to put in the joy, the wine will only lead to forgetfulness and drunkenness; but if you are filled inside with a deep sense of self worth and accomplishment – and you see the wine as an expression of your own state of human happiness – then the wine will lead to true rejoicing, sanctity and remembrance of the Divine Shabbat Shalom

### Insights Parshas Shemini Nissan 5781

Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic Universit

### Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Pesl bas Mendel Wolf. "May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

### Heaven on Earth

And it was on the eighth day... (9:1)

This week's parsha begins with Aharon and his sons' eighth day of the inauguration into the priesthood of serving in the Mishkan (see Rashi ad loc). The Talmud (Megillah 10b) makes a very interesting comment on this possuk; "it was taught in a Baraisa – [on this eighth day] Hashem rejoiced as when he created the heavens and earth." What does the inauguration of the Mishkan have to do with the creation of the world? Furthermore, we also find a cryptic reference to joy regarding the eighth day of inauguration of the Mishkan in Rashi in Shir Hashirim. The verse states, "Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, and on the day of the gladness of his heart" (3:11). Rashi (ad loc) explains the crown of the wedding day refers to the day that Bnei Yisroel accepted upon them the yoke of Torah – the day they received the Torah at Mount Sinai, and "the day of the gladness of his heart refers to the eighth day of the inauguration of the Mishkan."

So once again, we find that there is immense joy on the eighth day of the inauguration of the Mishkan (we are also compelled to point out that according to this Chazal a person's wedding day isn't necessarily the happiest day of one's life – sorry ladies). So what is the source of this unbridled joy attached to the final day of the inauguration of the Mishkan?

Hashem created the world to provide a vehicle for man to achieve the ultimate in goodness – a relationship with Hashem. The joy that was experienced in the creation of the world was the exciting anticipation of creating a home for man to exist in where he could earn all the good Hashem wanted to bestow.

The ultimate fulfillment of this vision was when Bnei Yisroel built a Mishkan, a home for Hashem, and invited Him to dwell in their midst in order to achieve the ultimate in good that Hashem could bestow in this world: A close personal relationship with Hashem. Building the Mishkan was in fact quite similar to the creation of the world; Chazal teach us that the reason Betzalel was chosen as the architect was because he alone knew how to combine all the letters that were used in creation and he utilized that knowledge to create the Mishkan.

R' Chaim Volozhin says, in the first chapter of his epic work *Nefesh Hachaim*, that the Mishkan is a miniature model of the universe, as is the human body. In other words, *Bnei Yisroel* modeled Hashem's behavior: Hashem created his world and invited man to live in it, and man created a similar world and invited Hashem to dwell with them. This parallel act was why the joy of creating the world was the same joy experienced at the inauguration of the Mishkan. The creation of the Mishkan was the ultimate fulfillment of Hashem's plan of giving man the opportunity to have a relationship with his creator.

### To Eat or Not to Eat

To distinguish between the impure and the pure, and between the animals that can be eaten and those animals which you should not eat (11:47).

At the end of this week's parsha we have forty seven verses devoted to the identification of the various kosher and non-kosher animals, fish, birds, and insects. The very last verse in the parsha contains a fascinating structural anomaly.

Kosher animals are referred to as animals that may be eaten (vegans take heart – there isn't a command to eat them), while non-kosher animals are identified as those that you may not eat. The Torah is clearly distinguishing a difference between kosher animals and non-kosher animals. Kosher animals are designated as edible, while non-kosher animals are not designated as inedible; rather they are merely designated as prohibited on the individual to consume. While this may seem to be a slight variation, it is in fact a monumental distinction.

Maimonides in his famous introduction to *Pirkei Avos* (Ethics of our Fathers), the philosophical work known as *Shemoneh Prakim*, discusses a fascinating question regarding moral achievement. Rambam wonders: What is a higher level of achievement; is it better for one to not want to sin or is it better for one to desire to sin but control his desires?

Maimonides answers that it depends on the type of sin one desires to do. He divides sins into two categories. The first is those that "are commonly agreed upon evils such as murder, theft, ingratitude, contempt for one's parents, and the like. These are sins that the rabbis have said 'even if they hadn't been written into law it would be proper to add them.'" The second category is of sins that if the Torah hadn't forbidden them they would not be considered transgressions at all. This includes: laws of *kashrut*, prohibition of wool and linen clothes, consanguineous marriages, and such (*Shemoneh Prakim*, Chapter 6).

According to Maimonides, regarding the first category of "rational sins," it is better not to want to do the sin. As he terms it; "a soul that desires these sins has a defect." The second category contains sins that are only forbidden because the Torah prohibits them, not because they are morally wrong. Regarding these sins it is better to say, "I desire them but what am I to do, Hashem has forbidden them."

Maimonides' remarkable distinction may also have very practical applications to those who either grew up without knowledge of the Torah commandments or those who accepted the yoke of Torah later in life, such as converts. How are they to view the indiscretions of their past? Are they permitted to look fondly on their earlier lives when they enjoyed eating lobster and cheese burgers? Perhaps the answer is yes, and they get even more reward knowing that in their current lives they freely choose to adhere to those laws because Hashem has forbidden them.

This is why the Torah describes the non-kosher animals in this week's parsha as those that one is commanded not to eat, rather than calling them inedible.

There are many who try to explain the laws of *kashrut* as rational outcomes for better health: eating pork could cause trichinosis, mixing milk and meat has deleterious effects on the body, eating properly slaughtered meat has less toxins and hormones than animals that are slaughtered in a non-kosher way, shrimp and lobster have exceedingly high cholesterol levels, etc. – therefore kosher is a healthier way to live. While some of these claims are valid, the overall theory is faulty. The reason we don't eat these forbidden animals isn't because they are "inedible," we don't eat them simply because Hashem has forbidden them to be eaten.

### Did You Know...

In this week's parsha we have a very detailed account of what the Jewish people are permitted to eat. The only permitted animals are those that have split hooves and chew their cud. Chazal state that since the Torah's list of animals that have a single indicator (either split hooves or chew their cud) is very detailed, Chazal created other indicators so we could easily identify kosher animals (*Chullin* 59a; *Shulchan Aruch*, YD 79:1). They concluded that any animal that chews its cud is kosher if it is not one of the three exceptions stated in the Torah. They also stated that all animals that do not have upper incisors, canines, or soft front tooth-like structures and chew their cud are kosher, with the one exception of the young camel.

In other words, the adult camel and the other two examples, while chew their cud, still possess these "teeth" that are not found in kosher animals. This dental indicator is considered enough to understand that an animal is kosher. So, if one were to come across an unknown animal that was not a young camel and found it to have no upper incisors, he may eat it. The Chachamim further stated that every animal that has completely split hooves also chews its cud and is therefore kosher, with the singular notable biblical exception – the pig (*Sefer HaEshkol*; *Shulchan Aruch*, YD 79:1). Therefore, any unknown species that has split hooves and is not a pig is kosher.

Interestingly, Chazal added an additional identifying feature of kosher animals that seemingly has no basis in the written Torah and is based solely on an oral tradition received by Moshe at Mount Sinai: Other than the wild donkey (in Hebrew – *arod*), no non-kosher animal has meat under the tail with grain that runs both ways. Therefore, if one slaughters an unknown animal and finds that the grain of its meat runs both ways, and knows that it is not a wild donkey, then the meat is kosher.

Additionally, the Mishna (*Niddah* 51b), at least according to Rashi's understanding, states that horns alone are enough to declare an animal kosher, since all horned animals are kosher.

Finally, it's important to note that scientists have classified many thousands of animals since the Torah was given to *Bnei Yisroel* 3,300 years ago, and in that time many thousands of new animals have been discovered. However, not one of the new animals has ever qualified as an added exception to those specifically written in the Torah. In other words, pigs are still the only animals with split hooves that don't chew their cud, and camels, shafans, and arneveses (the other two animals the Torah mentions), are still the only cud-chewing animals without split hooves!

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### *Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights*

*For the week ending 3 April 2021 / 21 Nisan 5781*

**Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - [www.seasonsofthemoon.com](http://www.seasonsofthemoon.com)**

#### *Parashat Shemini*

#### *Keeping Kosher*

*"Lest you become contaminated." (11:43)*

The road to holiness does not start with lofty ideals or sublime thoughts. It does not begin with a mind-expanding revelation or a "close encounter." It cannot be produced by psychotropic drugs, nor can it be experienced by climbing the Alps or the Andes.

True, gazing down from Mont Blanc or Everest may fill us with awe at the Creator's handiwork. Nature can truly inspire closeness to G-d, but all this inspiration will vanish like a cloud of smoke if we lack the fundamental ingredients needed to concretize inspiration into actuality. The road to holiness starts with a few small boring steps — such as being a decent, moral person, and controlling our emotions and appetites.

As Jews, we may not eat what we like when we like. On Pesach we may not eat bread. On Yom Tov we should eat meat. On Yom Kippur we may eat nothing. At all times, we may not eat the forbidden foods, which is the subject of this week's Torah portion.

“Lest you become contaminated.” In Hebrew, this sentence is expressed as one word: v’nitmayhem. The spelling of this word is unusual. It lacks an aleph and thus it can also read as v’nitumtem, which means “Lest you become dulled.”

In our search for holiness and meaning in this world, our greatest assets and aids are the laws of kashrut. Kosher food is soul food. Food for the soul. Food that feeds our spirituality and sharpens our ability to receive holiness. Food that is not kosher does the reverse. It dulls our spiritual senses. It makes us less sensitive, less receptive to holiness. A Jew who tries to seek holiness sitting on top of some mountain in the Far East, living on a diet of salted pork, will find it impossible to achieve his goal. The view of the Ganges or the Himalayas (or his own navel!) may titillate his spiritual senses, but he will find no growth or nourishment reaching his core.

The spiritual masters teach that if a person contaminates himself a little, he becomes contaminated a great deal. Spirituality is a delicate thing. It does not take much to jam the broadcast from Upstairs. On the other hand, a little bit of holiness goes a long way. As the Torah teaches, “You shall sanctify yourselves, and you shall become holy.” (Lev. 11:44) A little bit of sanctity generates a lot of holiness. If we sanctify ourselves down here in this lowly world, with all its barriers to holiness, if we guard our mouths, our eyes and our ears, then the Torah promises us that we will be given Divine help to lift us to lofty peaks of holiness.

It all starts with one small step.

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**Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message - Shemini 5781-2021**

**“Using, Not Abusing, a Sanctified Substance”**

(updated and revised from Shemini 5763-2003)

**Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald**

This week's parasha, parashat Shemini, opens at a most auspicious event, on the eighth and final day of the inauguration ceremony of the newly erected Tabernacle. The calendar date is the first of Nissan, also the day that Aaron and his sons were to be consecrated into the priesthood to serve as priests-Kohanim.

This day, for Aaron, was the day he had dreamed of for his entire life. Aaron's life had not been easy. Alone, he had suffered through the travails of leadership in Egypt during the early days of the enslavement period. After Moses returned to Egypt from Midian, Aaron had served faithfully at his brother's side, confronting Pharaoh and demanding that the Israelites be allowed to leave Egypt to worship for three days. He tried unsuccessfully to dissuade the newly freed people from worshiping the Golden Calf. Now, finally, after all his efforts and much grief, Aaron was to be installed as the High Priest of Israel. Even more satisfying was the fact that his four sons were going to serve alongside him.

Describing the consecration ceremony, the Torah, in Leviticus 10:1, reports, וְיַחַזְקֵה בְּנֵי אָהָרֹן בְּפָנֵינוּ אֶת־מִזְבֵּחַ הַעֲלֵלִית, אִישׁ מִזְבֵּחַ, וְיַקְרֵב לְפָנֵינוּ אֶת־שְׂמֵחָה, וְיַקְרֵב לְפָנֵינוּ אֶת־שְׂמֵחָה, אֲשֶׁר לֹא צָה אָתָּה. And the sons of Aaron, Nadav and Abihu, each took their fire pan and placed fire on it, and placed incense on the pan, and sacrificed the incense before G-d with a strange fire which G-d had not commanded. Suddenly, in the midst of the consecration ceremony, a fire comes forth from G-d and consumes Nadav and Abihu.

Moses tries to console his brother concerning the young men's death, recalling to Aaron that G-d had said to him (Leviticus 10:3): בְּקָרְבֵּן אֶקְרֹב, “I shall be sanctified with those who are nigh to Me!” He explained to Aaron, that through death, G-d had sanctified and elevated Nadav and Abihu. Aaron's reaction to the tragedy is then recorded (Leviticus 10:3): יְהִי־אָתָּה –total silence.

The young men's bodies were then removed from the Tabernacle, and the Torah immediately instructs the remaining children of Aaron, Elazar and Ithamar, regarding the limitations of priestly mourning. This instruction is then followed by the law prohibiting priests to be in a state of inebriation when performing the sacred service.

While the deaths of Nadav and Abihu were a tragedy for the entire Jewish nation, the event was truly heartbreakng for their father, Aaron.

At the moment of his highest joy, he loses two of his precious children. Nevertheless, his reaction is silence, probably because there really is nothing that can be said by a parent, or to a parent, who loses a child.

The rabbis, who are perplexed by the lack of clarity regarding the cause of this tragedy, provide a host of reasons for the deaths of Nadav and Abihu. Perhaps, say the rabbis, the boys were among those who, after the revelation at Sinai, were arrogant and irreverent on the mountain (Exodus 24:11). Perhaps, it was because they brought a strange fire, not from the altar. Could it be that instead of using the vessels of the Tabernacle (as suggested by the language of the verse), they brought their own fire pans? The Midrash Rabbah (Leviticus 20:10), suggests that the sin of Nadav and Abihu was that they refused to marry and have children because they felt that no woman was good enough for them. The Talmud, Sanhedrin 52a, states that Nadav and Abihu showed a lack of respect for Moses and Aaron, even saying publicly: “When will these old fellows die, so that we may take control of the community?”

Other commentators disagree, arguing strongly that there is no evidence to support the claim that Nadav and Abihu were sinful. To the contrary, they claim that Nadav and Abihu were exceedingly righteous. The Midrash Tanchuma (Leviticus 6:6), maintains that the fact that the Torah emphasizes that they brought an שָׁרֶם אָשָׁה, a strange fire, indicates that they might have been misguided only in this one matter, but otherwise they were entirely pure, and guilty of nothing else. Other commentators say that though they used the wrong means to bring the Divine Presence into the Tabernacle, their motives were noble, and inspired by love and joy. Even their punishment implies that they had attained a high spiritual level. That is why G-d slew them with a pure fire, their clothes remaining intact. In fact, suggest the rabbis, the Almighty grieved over Nadav and Abihu more than their own father, Aaron.

Whatever the reason for the deaths of the two young men, the juxtaposition of Leviticus 10:8-11 concerning priests not drinking intoxicants before they perform the service in the Temple, establishes the prohibition of drinking at the forefront of the reasons for the deaths of Nadav and Abihu. While on duty, intoxicants are strictly prohibited.

The severe punishment meted out to the sons of Aaron leaves us with compelling reason to carefully study the Jewish attitude toward intoxicants and drugs. In Numbers 6, the Bible teaches about Nazarites, people who dedicate themselves to G-d by refusing to cut their hair, not coming in contact with the dead, and abstaining from drinking wine. The mighty Samson and the Prophet Samuel, were two of the most noted Nazarites.

The case of the Nazarite is the only case in the Bible where drinking is prohibited. Otherwise, drinking is considered normal and proper in Jewish life. In fact, the Psalmist writes in Psalm 104:15: וַיַּעֲשֵׂה לְבָבֵי אָנָשָׁן, that wine cheers the hearts of men.

Wine, of course, plays a key role in the rituals of Judaism. Wine is used in the sanctification of the Sabbath and the Holiday Kiddush, at Havdalah—the closing Shabbat and holiday service, and, of course, during the marriage ceremony.

Studies of Jewish intoxication indicate that Jews drink about as much as non-Jews, and are subject to the same vagaries as all drinkers of intoxicants in the United States. What is unusual, is that the studies indicate that those who are involved in Jewish life on a regular basis, those who adopt the traditional customs and rituals associated with Jewish tradition, are not subject to intoxication to the same extent as those who have abandoned tradition. For the traditionalists, a moderate amount of wine is drunk at Kiddush both on Friday night and Saturday morning. Hence, wine never becomes “forbidden fruit,” and is therefore drunk in moderation in most Jewish homes that observe these traditional rituals. Among secular Jews, however, who have given up the value system associated with traditional customs, the incidence of alcohol abuse is more common.

A paraphrase of the German quip, “Wie est sich christelt, so judelt sich”—as the Christians do—so do the Jews, very well describes the current Jewish community's situation with respect to alcohol and drug abuse. Jews are subject to the same blandishments and temptations of the general populace, and abuse of alcohol and drugs is clearly on the

rise. The fact that in the Jewish community, traditional Jews don't hide or forbid intoxicants from their children, but instead teach them about it in a socially acceptable way, has proven to be quite effective. A good example of this is that on the festive holiday of Purim, which was observed last month, the Talmud (Megillah 7b) states that a person is required to drink **בְּרִיתְמָה**, until he doesn't know the difference between Haman and Mordechai. But, we may not drink beyond the point where we are no longer capable of discerning the difference between Haman and Mordechai.

Alcoholism and drug abuse are serious business. They are not something that can be ignored. The Jewish community needs to make certain that our Sabbaths, festivals and celebrations are not marred by unacceptable practices of wanton drinking. Wine is a divine gift, and plays a key role in Judaism. We need to make sure that it is treated with respect, and used as a special gift.

*May you be blessed.*

- Just Say Treif!

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**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

**Dvar Torah Shemini: The surprising value of self-doubt**

If you think that you're not good enough, perhaps that's the very reason why you're the best person for the job. We learn this from Parshat Shemini. Hashem had elected Aharon to become the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest of our nation. All future kohanim, priests, would be descended from him to this day.

Hesitation

The people gathered around the tabernacle in the wilderness for a ceremony with him which Aharon was to be inducted into high office. Everything was ready for the occasion, but there was hesitation. Moshe needed to say to his brother,

“Krav el hamizbeach,” – “Approach the altar,” as if to suggest, “What are you waiting for?”

Rashi quotes the Torat Kohanim which explains that Aharon was hesitating because he was a man filled with fear of Hashem. He had deep humility and he feared that something might go wrong. He appreciated the enormous responsibility that he had. Moshe reassured him by stating,

“Lechach nivcharta,” – “It is for this reason that you've been chosen. Come forward.”

The Sefer Panim Yafot explains that, “Lechach nivcharta,” those words of Moshe to Aharon, should be translated as, “It's because of this that you've been chosen.” It's because you have great emunah, faith in Hashem, such deep humility – because you're nervous that something might go wrong. That's why you're the best person for this task.

Responsibility

In the mid-19th century, Reb Yosroel Salanter was the rabbi of the Vilna Jewish Community. A man from a neighbouring town came to see him to be tested to become the shochet of that town. He did wonderfully well throughout the test but before Reb Yisroel actually gave him the result the man stopped him and said,

“You know, Reb Yisroel, I don't think I should become the shochet. I'll go home now.”

Surprised, Reb Yisroel said, what do you mean?”

The man explained, “Well, you know, the responsibility is enormous! Every single member of the community will be relying on me for the kashrut of their kitchens, for every morsel of food that will be upon their plate! I'm nervous that I could make mistakes!”

Reb Yisroel smiled as he said, “You've just proved to me that there could be no shochet better than you for this task. We don't want shochtim who are filled with arrogance, who don't believe that anything can ever go wrong, to be responsible for our food. Rather we want those who appreciate that they need to prove to the communities that they deserve the faith that has been put in them.”

That's exactly what Moshe said to Aharon. Your sense of responsibility proves that there could be no leader better than you. Let each and every one of us remember that lesson with regard to the jobs, the vocations and

the professions that we have. Arrogance can, God forbid, drive us to failure but if we constantly go the extra mile filled with nervousness knowing that we need to show that we deserve the trust that has been placed in us, that will certainly contribute towards our success.

*Shabbat shalom.*

*Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.*

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**Drasha Parshas Shemini - Just Say Treif!**

**Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

In teaching us the kosher laws this week, the Torah deviates from a meritorious procedure.

Normally the Torah hardly elaborates unnecessarily, yet Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi tells us in Tractate Pesachim that in Parshas Noach the Torah deviated from its normal propensity to abbreviate. In fact, it added eight letters for a very special reason. Rabbi Yehoshua explains, “A person should never emit a harsh expression from his mouth, that is why in Parshas Noach when the Torah tells us that Noach animals into his ark it takes pain to add letters.” The Torah tells us that “Noach took sets of seven males and females of each the tahor (kosher) animal species, and a set of two animals non-tahor (kosher) species” (Genesis 7:8-9).

“The Torah,” continues Rabbi Yehoshua, “could have just said one simple word to describe the non-kosher animals – tamei! (treif). Yet to teach us the importance of clean speech it uses an elaborate Hebrew terminology, animals that are not kosher, instead of a simpler and shorter expression, treif animals. The Torah avoids calling creatures, even non-kosher ones, tamei (impure) rather it labels them as ‘animals that are not classified as tahor.’”

This week however, the Torah is not as tempered. In Parshas Shmini, the Torah prescribes the laws of kosher and non-kosher. It specifies for us those signs and characteristics of kosher animals. Those who do not meet the specifications are deemed tamei (non-kosher). Among those classified as non-kosher are hare, the camel, the hyrax, and of course, the pig. The Torah refers to these animals as tamei! It waives the graciousness it displays in Parshas Noach. It does not label them as “animals that are not tahor. It calls them treif! Why the curt classification? What happened to the gentle etiquette so beautifully professed by Rabbi Yehoshua?

The governor of a group of small villages decided to make an official visit to one of the more backward farm communities of his province. The mayor of the village, a simple farmer who had no idea of neither social graces, nor etiquette received him. The farmer's wife made tea, the water of which was scooped from a muddy stream and set to boil. Upon sipping the first bit of the dirt-filled libation, the governor immediately spit it out and shouted, “What did you serve me? This is terrible!” The governor proceeded to show the mayor and his wife exactly how to strain water through cheese-cloth in order to make a proper glass of tea. Amazed, both husband and wife accepted the advice gratefully.

A few weeks later, there was a fire in the village. Reports to the governor said that though there had been ample water, manpower, and time to contain the blaze, for some reason the fire had managed to destroy most of the town. The governor arrived at the home of the mayor to inquire what, exactly, went wrong.

“You see, dear governor,” beamed the hapless mayor, “the men were going to use the muddy brook-water to extinguish the blaze, but I stopped them! I showed them how to filter the water, and remove the small rocks and dirt. Since your visit, we never used filthy water again!”

“You fool!” shouted the governor. “You filter for tea, not a fire! When a fire is raging you must put it out immediately – even with dirty water!”

The story of Noach is a narrative. The Torah can well afford to classify the non-kosher animals in a positive light. After all, for the sake of the story it does not make a difference if the animals are referred to as tamei, or not tahor. The Torah chose the gentler way. However when telling us to avoid eating animals which are not kosher, the Torah does not offer circuitous etiquette, it declares boldly – “they are traif!”

We live in a world that is wrought with many dangers. Sometimes we must say, "no," to our friends, our children, and ourselves, in a very curt and abrupt way. A particular action, behavior, or influence, may be much worse than "not-so-good." They may be *traif*, and must simply be stated as such. Saying "no" may lack class, but it may work.

There is a time and place for every expression. When etiquette will work, it must be used; but when a fire is burning, and the situation demands powerful exhortation, any water, even if it is a little muddy, must be used!

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*Rabbi M. Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.*

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**Rabbi Zvi Slobolofsky**

***A Life of Holiness and Purity***

Sefer Vayikra begins with the halachos of korbanos, specifically Parshas Vayikra and the beginning of Tzav elaborate on the korbanos themselves. Tzav then concludes, and parshas Shemini begins, with the application of these laws as the dedication of the Mishkan is completed. Sefer Vayikra then continues with a seemingly different focus; the second half of Parshas Shemini discusses the halachos of tumah and taharah. The laws of kashrus are connected to this area of halacha and are therefore presented in the overall context of these laws as well. Ritual impurity of food, vessels, and the institution of the mikvah to purify people and vessels conclude Parshas Shemini. Continuing with this theme, Parshas Tazria and Metzorah deal at great length with the intricacies of a person becoming impure in various ways. The relevance of the laws of tumah and taharah in Sefer Vayikra, which is primarily dedicated to laws governing the Mishkan and later the Beis HaMikdash, seems obvious, since from a halachic perspective that the laws of impurity are most significant in the context of the Mishkan and korbanos. Sacrifices that become impure are disqualified and individuals who are impure may not come to the Mishkan. Perhaps, however, there is another message that the Torah is hinting at by placing the laws of purity and impurity in the context of the korbanos.

The Rambam teaches us that the rules that govern korbanos as well as tumah and taharah are fundamentally part of the category of mitzvos known as chukim. The chukim have no apparent reason that is comprehensible to man. Even though the ultimate reason for the chukim are only known to Hashem, the Rambam suggests that there are lessons that we can derive from the symbolism of these otherwise incomprehensible mitzvos. Following this approach, perhaps the relationship between korbanos and tumah can teach a lesson that is relevant to us.

Kedusha is the defining feature of all korbanos. Korbanos are offered by a sanctified individual, a Kohen, in a holy place, the Beis HaMikdash. The eating of all korbanos is governed by kedushas z'man and kedushas Makom, sanctity of time and sanctity of place. The category of korbanos known as kodshei kodoshim are even holier than kodshim kalim and are bound by stricter rules of holiness of time and place. Offering and partaking of a korban is an experience of kedusha, and all kedusha emanates from Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself. We are commanded to be holy because Hashem is holy. Eating korbanos is described by Chazal as eating from the table of Hashem. It is precisely korbanos being so holy that requires them to be free of all impurity. Neither the Kohen who offers them, nor the Yisrael who eats them, can be impure. If the meat of a korban comes into contact with something impure, it must be burned. Experiencing Hashem as we involve ourselves in a holy activity cannot occur in a state of impurity.

This concept speaks to us even outside the realm of korbanos. We seek holiness as we connect to Hashem in many ways. The words of Torah study are holy and our mitzvah performance is referred to as "kidshu b'mitzvosov", we are sanctified by His mitzvos. Our tefillos correspond to korbanos and our shuls are described by Chazal as miniature batei mikdash. Shabbos and yom tov are times of kedushas zman, and each such time begins with the recitation of Kiddush. All of these moments of spending time with Hashem, the ultimate source of kedusha, can only be

experienced properly if they are devoid of tumah. Purity of thought, speech, and action are critical for a life of kedusha. Chazal teach us that one who wants to purify oneself will be assisted by Hashem in doing so. May we all merit that special assistance as we grow in our kedusha.

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***Shmini: Ritual distancing***

***Ben-Tzion Spitz***

*Distance has the same effect on the mind as on the eye. - Samuel Johnson*

The Torah provides a substantial amount of detail regarding the laws of what animals we're allowed to eat as well as those we are commanded to stay far away from. No insects or shellfish are allowed. The only seafood we're allowed is those fish that have scales and fins.

The Torah also gives a long list of all the birds we're not allowed to eat. The number of kosher birds we can partake of is relatively limited and are exclusively non-predatory.

In the mammal category, there is the general guideline of only being allowed to eat animals who both chew their cud and have split hooves. Beyond that general guideline, the Torah also specifies mammals who have one or the other of those attributes which are not kosher. Having split hooves or chewing its cud is not enough; the animal is only kosher if it has both attributes. The prime and notorious example of a non-kosher mammal is the pig, which even though it has split hooves, it doesn't chew its cud.

The verse immediately after the one that singles out the pig and its other non-kosher mammal friends states that not only should you not eat these animals, but you shouldn't even touch their carcass.

The Bechor Shor on the verse (Leviticus 11:8) wonders about the seeming redundancy. If you're not allowed to even touch the dead meat, then how would one come to eat it?

He explains that while the prohibition regarding non-kosher food is quite strict, the statement regarding not touching the non-kosher item is just some good advice and not a legal obligation according to Jewish law.

He elaborates that there is something intrinsically filthy and disgusting about non-kosher food that even touching it could somehow contaminate us. It possesses an impurity and foulness that can somehow be conveyed not only into our bodies but to our very souls. However, if one were to find a dead carcass of non-kosher meat in one's home, one would be obliged to remove it, even though it would entail touching it. The slight contact with the contaminating food in order to remove it is justified in comparison to keeping the putrid item in your home.

May we always remain far away from items that may contaminate us and only partake of clean, healthful food.

*Dedication - To the opening up of venues in general, and Yeshiva in particular.*

*Shabbat Shalom*

*Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.*

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***Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz***

***Parashat Shmini - 5781***

***Purity of the Soul, Restraint, and Humility***

Large sections of the book of Leviticus, which we are in the midst of reading now, deal with laws pertaining to the Temple and to the roles of the kohanim (priests). Other sections of the book detail the laws of purity and impurity which are also largely irrelevant for a time when the Temple is not standing. However, in this week's parasha of Shmini, we read a detailed section that is relevant to every Jew throughout time: the laws of kashrut. The Torah specifies the signs upon which we can recognize which animal, fish, or fowl we are allowed to eat and which is forbidden.

Kashrut is a significant part of Jewish identity. The basic principle of kashrut is that what a person puts into his body affects not only his physical health but the purity of his soul as well. For thousands of years, humanity has been aware that the food we eat impacts our body's health. As science has evolved, there has been an ever-increasing awareness of

the specific influences of various foods on our bodies. However, the effect of food on the purity of our souls is a Jewish innovation. This is not scientific knowledge, but knowledge passed down via tradition from a divine source, and as a result it has become characteristic of a Jew loyal to Jewish tradition.

In the past, foods were simpler and were composed of familiar ingredients. It was easy to know if a certain food was kosher or not. As the food industry developed, it became more and more complicated to know if a food item, which could be made of tens or even hundreds of ingredients, was kosher and permissible. For this reason, there are kashrut networks around the world that operate supervision from the production of basic ingredients to the preparation of the products. This made it possible for any Jew to know if any given product is kosher or not.

Other than the benefit in preserving the purity of the soul by observing kashrut, there is an additional, very significant benefit. A Jew who pays attention to the kashrut of food is exercising restraint and self-control on a daily basis.

We are all aware of the abundance and availability in our world over these past few decades. But such abundance also creates a challenge to our self-control and to our ability to delay gratification. As our world advances in industry and technology, we also see an increased challenge to our ability to restrain ourselves and withstand attraction or strong desire. The solution is repeatedly practicing restraint and delay of needs satisfaction. Every Jew who keeps kosher is practicing this daily, often several times a day. By paying attention to what is or isn't kosher, we become more stable, responsible, and deliberate.

Kashrut also sets limits on human control over the environment. We are used to controlling what surrounds us. Is there any product not available for sale? If, in the past, there were products available only in a certain country, nowadays, a person can order anything from anywhere in the world with a few simple keystrokes and have it delivered within days. We feel like we can control what exists around us, and correlated with that, our egos swell, consideration of others gets trampled, ecology gets destroyed, and we attain a sense of ownership over reality. And we hunger for more.

On the other hand, a person who keeps kosher knows: I cannot eat this food item, or drink this drink. He gets constant reminders of the fact that he is not the owner of reality. It is a reminder of humility in the face of creation. A person is welcome to use and enjoy his environment, but he does not control it.

And lastly, kashrut requires us to remember the profound difference between us and living creatures: moral insight, conscience, and choice. As opposed to animals, man can restrain his attraction and obey the divine command that forbids him from eating certain foods. This is the glory of man and his greatness.

*The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.*

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### Rav Kook Torah

#### **Shemini: The Priestly Benediction**

##### **Chanan Morrison**

The Tabernacle inauguration concluded with a blessing from the High Priest:

"Aaron lifted his hands towards the people and blessed them. He then descended from preparing the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the peace offerings." (Lev. 9:22)

##### **When Was the Blessing Recited?**

From the Torah's account, it would seem that Aaron blessed the people before he completed the service in the newly dedicated Tabernacle. The Sages, however, explained that the actual order was different. First, Aaron completed the offerings and descended from the altar. Only afterwards did he bless the people (Torat kohanim, Megillah 18a).

If the priestly benediction was performed at the end of the Temple service (which nowadays is recited at the end of the Amidah prayer), why does the Torah imply a different order?

The True Honor of kohanim

When discussing the contribution of the kohanim to the Jewish people, and the corresponding honor they receive, we must distinguish between their current state and their future potential.

We may respect an individual kohen for his scholarship and piety, but the true honor we bestow to kohanim is in recognition of their holy influence over the entire nation. We honor them primarily for their future potential, for what a kohen should and can be — "for he is an emissary of God of the hosts" (Malachi 2:7). Even if the kohen is undeserving of such honor in his present state, "You must strive to keep him holy... he will be holy for you, since I am holy" (Lev. 21:8). His holiness is due to his potential benefit to the nation, as a member of the sanctified family.

(This, by the way, is similar to the honor we give to rabbis and teachers. We respect them for their erudition and also as representatives of the institution of the rabbinate. This honor is in recognition of the overall contribution of the rabbinate to the welfare of the people. The rabbi on his part should realize that he is primarily honored for what he ought to be, and should do his best to fulfill this expectation.)

##### **Two Roles of the Priesthood**

The function of the kohanim is not only to serve in the Temple. The kohanim are also expected to teach and elevate the people, as it says, "From the kohen's lips they will guard knowledge, and they will seek Torah from his mouth" (Malachi 2:7). These two roles are interrelated, since the source for their spiritual influence on the people originates in the holiness of their service in the Temple.

There is one duty of the kohanim that combines both of these roles: the priestly blessing. This blessing is part of the Temple service, and at the same time, reflects their interaction with the people. The kohanim recite the blessing with outstretched arms, a sign that their efforts to uplift the people are an extension and continuation of their holy service in the Temple.

##### **Bridging the Past and the Future**

The blessing also forms a bridge over time, connecting the past with the future and the actualized with the potential.

The kohanim can best fulfill their mission to uplift the people after they have participated in the Temple service and experienced the unique elevation of soul gained through this holy public service. Their blessing will then reflect the highest level of influence and inspiration the kohen is able to impart. Thus, the blessing indicates the present state of the kohen, while being based on his past service, and extending — like his outstretched arms — to his future potential influence.

Now we can resolve the apparent contradiction between the Torah's account and actual practice. The text implies that the kohanim complete their service after blessing the people. The service referred to here is not their service in the Temple, but their role in uplifting the people, which is truly their primary mission. In practice, however, the priestly blessing needs to be based on the holy services that they have already performed. Therefore, it is recited only after they have completed their service in the Temple.

##### **The Impact of Prayer**

A similar phenomenon is found at the end of the Amidah prayer, when we say, "May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be acceptable before You" (Psalms 19:15).

It would appear more logical to recite this plea before praying. In fact, the verse does not refer to the prayer about to be recited, but to our heartfelt aspiration that we should be able to apply the influence of this prayer on the coming day. Like the priestly benediction, this request forms a bridge between two states. It is based on the prayer service just performed, but it looks forward to the future influence of this spiritual elevation on our lives.

*(Gold from the Land of Israel pp. 187-189. Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. I, pp. 284-285; Otzerot HaRe'iyah vol. II, pp. 211-212)*

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### Shema Yisrael Torah Network

#### **Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Shemini**

##### **פרשת שמיני תשפ"א**

##### **ויקחו בני אהרן נדב ואביהו איש מחתתו**

**The sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, each took his fire pan. (10:1)**

*Yalkut Shemini (Shemini, Remez 524)* adds that each one – Nadav and Avihu – took his fire pan, *mei'atzmo*, on his own, neither discussing it with – nor accepting advice from – his brother. The two brothers erred in thinking that it was a *mitzvah* to offer on their own without first receiving a Divine mandate. It makes sense to assume that their error was extremely minute, as they were such righteous individuals. They certainly did not arrive at their individual decisions without intense cogitation. Clearly, they thought the matter through and rendered their individual decisions. Nonetheless, the *Yalkut* implies, that had they talked it over together and sought each other's advice, things might have been different. Why is this? They both arrived at the same decision independently of one another. Would a conversation between them have changed the result?

Horav A. Henoch Leibowitz, zl, derives from here that even if both autonomously felt that this was the correct approach, had they sought the other's advice, they would have arrived at the truth – which they did not by going at it alone. This is human nature; once one expresses his opinion to another person, he is apt to review and deliberate with greater depth and clarity, thus arriving at the truth.

Seeking and giving advice are central to effective leadership and decision-making. People misgauge in thinking that pursuing advice, talking it over with someone, is a weakness that indicates passivity on the part of the guidance seeker. On the contrary, it demonstrates that one is concerned about developing the best possible solution and that he is open to feedback from others. He understands that others might have a new or different take on the matter, which can add nuance and texture to his line of thinking.

One must overcome hurdles, of which first and foremost is an ingrained tendency to prefer one's own opinion – irrespective of its merit. To seek advice requires greatness, restraint, dignity and strong self-esteem, which are commodities not easily acquired. One who seeks advice must overcome his self-imposed notion that he already has all the answers. Over-confidence leads to solo decision-making which can be misguided by one's delusional thinking. Some who ask for help have already made up their minds, but only seek validation and encouragement – not advice. It is difficult to advise someone who does not sincerely want your assistance.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* quotes from *Pirkei Avos* (6:6) where *Chazal* detail the forty-eight *kinyanei haTorah*, ways to acquire Torah, among which is included *dikduk chaverim*, precision/analysis with fellow students. We normally understand *dikduk chaverim* as an opportunity to correct one's mistakes, or to better one's logic by listening to what the other fellow has to say. It goes much further than this. When one reviews his thoughts, so that his friend hears what he has to say, he delves deeper into the logic. By plumbing its depths, he will arrive at the truth. In other words, the mere fact that he must present his thoughts to his fellow serves as a catalyst for him to review and question his original reasoning until he arrives at the truth.

Furthermore, the mind grows from social interaction. Reason and intelligence develop and grow the more people interface with one another. One who spends his youth alone, without even the stimulating effect of parents, will grow up staring at the world through a fog of dull indifference. When one spends time with others, he has access to precise knowledge concerning everything that he learns. Otherwise, he is not in the loop. Others will not listen to an individual whose mind is not stimulated, because he very likely has nothing much to offer.

In his commentary to *Pirkei Avos*, *Maharal* adds that when a person learns by himself, his mind remains imbedded within his body. Only when he teams with another person does his mind extend beyond himself, to the point that it enables him to have a purer connection to the Torah.

Last, when one presents his thoughts to another person, he learns to deal with opposition. When Reuven prepares his thesis to be read by Shimon, he will make sure to address whatever question Shimon may have – thus solidifying and strengthening his presentation. This is especially true if the presenter has a different perspective than his audience. Life is not a bed of roses, and we often have to deal with

people and situations which test our patience and acumen. Life is filled with contradictions and incongruities. When we feel that our opinion is founded and rooted in analytic bedrock, however, the product of precise analysis and cogency that has been reviewed from all angles, we feel confident and sure. When we preempt every question that might be posed to us, we cover every negative ramification that might result from our decision. There is no question that Nadav and Avihu were the most distinguished and holy upcoming leaders of *Klal Yisrael*. Their thoughts regarding the offering they brought had merit in their eyes, only because they were not compelled to present their opinion for scrutiny. Had each one individually known that his opinion would be scrutinized, he might have thought twice before acting on his own.

**'וַיָּמָתוּ לְפָנֵי דָ'**

### **And they died before Hashem. (10:2)**

When a person renders a decision, he must take into consideration its effect on others, as well as all the ramifications, direct and indirect, present and future, that will result from his decision. Nadav and Avihu did not marry. *Chazal* (*Midrash Rabbah*, *Vayikra* 20:10) consider them guilty of haughtiness for not marrying. They would say, "Our father is the High Priest;" "Our father's brother is the king/leader of the nation;" "Our uncle is the *Nasi*, Prince of the tribe of Yehudah." "We are next in line for the hierarchy of the Priesthood. Is there a woman that is suitable for/worthy of us?" As a result of their decision not to marry, many women remained *agunos*, unmarried, in the individual hope that she might be the lucky girl who marries one of them. According to the *Midrash*, Nadav and Avihu were held responsible for having catalyzed an increase in the number of unmarried women. This must be qualified. Why should they be blamed for what might be considered a ludicrous act on the part of the women?

Horav A. Henoch Leibowitz, zl, derives from here that a person will have to answer for the fallout of his actions. We do not live in a vacuum. Our society is close and people often render decisions which affect many lives based upon their actions. Nadav and Avihu made a personal decision concerning their own lives. Why should they be faulted? Obviously, the previous sentence is wrong. They did not have personal lives. As *gedolei Yisrael*, their lives touched upon the lives of others. Their decisions affected others. As long as someone – regardless of how wrong he is – is somehow hurt by my decision, I am held responsible. I cannot simply say, "Who cares what he does? I did not tell him to act so foolishly." If my actions impact another person, I must think twice before I act.

Interestingly, *Chazal* attribute other laxes in spiritual perfection to Nadav and Avihu, infractions that, on the surface, would suggest greater reason for punishment than catalyzing a woman's self-imposed *agunah* status. Apparently, their actions bespoke a vestige of haughtiness on their part. Also, by not marrying, they were being *mevatel*, abrogating, the *mitzvah* of *pru' urvu*, be fruitful and multiply. Those are serious reasons for censure. Yet, they died because they were (unknowingly) the cause of women not marrying. Apparently, we have no idea the pain a woman who is unable to marry experiences. This is true, regardless of whether she has yet to meet her Heavenly-designated match, or she is the innocent victim of a recalcitrant husband who is more concerned with assuaging his dominant ego at the expense of his wife than with the pain he causes to her and their children. Causing a fellow Jew to feel pain, to suffer emotional distress, is a terrible sin which Hashem does not forgive.

This might not be the proper venue to remonstrate about the plight of *agunos*. When it involves Jewish pain, however, no concept of not being the right venue exists. Very few understand the plight of an *agunah*, chained wife, who is unable to continue with life because she is chained to a marriage that, for all intents and purposes, no longer exists, other than in the mind of her intractable husband and the few sick supporters he can garner. The *agunah* suffers; her children, who are the ransom in her captivity, and her family must look on, chin up, and not engage in what is not their affair. Yet, they must look on as their child withers away before their very eyes. The only hope that keeps them all going forward is the knowledge that Hashem feels her/their pain and He

is with her/them every day. He has a plan, and we are all part of it. We must be patient as Hashem allows the plan to play itself out.

Some people – very special people – have hearts that are so huge that they can encompass our pain, people such as *Horav Chaim Shmuelovitz, zl*. He understood and was sensitive to the struggle of the *agunah*. It was during the Six Day War, and Yerushalayim was being shelled. The *Mir Yeshivah*, and people from all over the *Bais Yisrael* neighborhood in which the *yeshivah* is located, took cover in the *yeshivah*'s air raid shelter. Jordan kept on shelling, while the *yeshivah* continued learning and *davening*. The shells executed a direct hit against the *yeshivah*. At that moment, the shouts of *Shema Yisrael* could be heard loud and clear. It was precisely at that moment, as everyone's anxiety level peaked, that a woman whose husband had abandoned her years earlier, leaving her an *agunah* with no livelihood and no hope, cried out to Hashem, "Ribono Shel Olam, I forgive my husband. I forgive the indignity and humiliation he put me through. I forgive him all the great pain to which he subjected me all of these years. I ask that You, too, forgive us for whatever failures we have."

*Rav Chaim*, who was in that room together with his *talmidim*, students, explained that it was the *agunah*'s plea that superseded even the passionate *tefillos*, prayers and their powerful recital of *Shema Yisrael*. The passionate forgiveness of a woman who was so miserably rejected, yet she was able to be *mevater*, concede and give in, when she had every reason not to, catalyzed the salvation of the *Yeshivah*. Hashem listened to her, and they were all saved.

אך את זה לא תאכלו ... את הגמל כי מגלה גרה והוא ופרסה איננו מפריס ... ואת השפן כי מעלה גרה הוא ופרסה לא יפרים ... ואת הארנבת כי מעלה גרה היא ופרסה לא הפרישה טמאה היא לילם

**But this is what you shall not eat... the camel (for it brings up its cud), buts its hoof is not split ... and the hyrax, for it brings up its cud, but its hoof is not split... and the hare, for it brings up its cud, but its hoof is not split. It is unclean to you. (11:4,5,6)**

The Torah teaches us that an animal achieves kosher status when it possesses two identifying signs/characteristics: split hooves; and chews/brings up its cud. We are taught that three animals, the camel, hyrax and hare, chew their cud, but, since they do not have split hooves, they are deemed unkosher. In his *Nitzotzos*, *Horav Yitzchak Hershkowitz, Shlita*, observes what appears to be an anomaly in recording the three circumstances of a lack of split hooves. In animal number one, the camel, the Torah writes, *uparsah einenah mafris*, which loosely translated means, it presently does not have split hooves. The next animal, the hyrax, is described by the Torah, *u'parshah lo yafris*, which means, it will not have split hooves. The last animal, the hare, is portrayed as, *u'parshah lo hifrisah*, it did not have split hooves – in the past tense. Why does the Torah vary its characterization of the unkosher aspect of the animal in three tenses? It could have just as well delineated the reason in one tense.

*Rav Hershkowitz* suggests a homiletic rendering of these *pesukim* which implies an inspirational lesson concerning how we should view and judge people. *Chazal* teach, *Hevi dan es kol ha'adam l'kaf z'chus*; "Judge every person favorably." Give everyone the benefit of the doubt. A common variation of this maxim is, "Judge not a person until you have walked (a mile) in his shoes." We never really understand a person until we consider things from his vantage point, from his point of view, based upon what he has experienced in life.

What is the meaning of *kol ha'adam* – every person, or all of the person? The accepted understanding of this phrase is, every person has a past; he lives in the present, and, with Hashem's blessing, he will have a future. When we are about to judge someone, do not judge him solely on his past actions or his present demeanor. Every person (hopefully) has a future. He might change. Circumstances in his life might be altered to the point that his future now appears bright and hopeful. Every person has a moment/period/stage in life in which he does not meritiously judge the whole person – past, present and future. As the *Maharal* puts it: Only Hashem is able to judge the whole person. Only Hashem knows every person's good and bad deeds – and their motivations and provocations. Many people have seriously erred in life,

made poor choices. These same people could really be good people who sadly became victims of others due to circumstances beyond their control, or fell in with the wrong people. Prior to judging them and writing them off (which is sadly so common), remember that we have a concept of *kol ha'adam*, all of the person. Hashem is the only One Who can judge any person in the context of his whole life, thus acknowledging the good and bad that comprise his life.

We now return to the three *pesukim* which present the lack of split hooves in three frames: past, present and future. The Torah is teaching us that before we render the *siman tumah*, sign of ritual impurity, we must be certain that it was impure, is impure and (for all intents and purposes, based upon what we see now), it will continue in its impurity, with no redeeming value. Only then does the Torah agree to refer to this creature as *tamei*.

I came across an interesting idea which will alert us to something which I think most (all) of us are guilty. A teacher conducted an experiment with his class. He held up a white paper plate in which he had placed a small black dot. He then asked the students to describe to him what they saw. The first student said he saw a black spot. Another student asserted it was a target for shooting practice. A third student said he simply saw a faulty or dirty plate. The teacher looked at the class and asked: "Did not anyone among you see a white plate?"

We have become attuned to looking at (picking out) the black spots. Essentially, this was a large, white plate with a tiny, black spot in the middle. We are so used to looking for the dirt, the negative, the imperfections, that we fail to see the large picture: the white plate. We do this to people at times, even to our own children. We ignore their successes and achievements and, instead, focus on the black dots. We are judgmental and critical, when we should be seeing the good in others. I might add that, veritably, it is impossible to ignore the black dot, but we must remember and reiterate in our minds that it is only one tiny black dot on a large white plate, and it is only because the plate/background is so white that we even notice the black dot.

כי אני ד' אליכם והתקדשتم והייתם קדשים

**For I am Hashem your G-d, you are to sanctify yourselves and you shall become holy. (11:44)**

*Ibn Ezra* adds to the *pasuk*: "You shall sanctify yourselves because I am Hashem your G-d. I gave you *mitzvos* and statutes to guard (and observe), so that you will maintain your holiness." In other words, the *mitzvos* which we observe protect us. The greater our affiliation with and observance of *mitzvos*, the greater is our protection from failure and falling into the abyss of sin and spiritual contamination. One night, quite late, *Horav Akiva Eiger, zl*, *Rav* of Posen and the preeminent Torah giant of his generation, heard knocking at his door. As *Rav* of the city, the people knew that he was the 24/7 address for every Jew in need. The fact that it was late at night, when most Jews had retired for the night, did not matter. The *Rav* was surely awake. He was always learning. The *Gaon* went to his door to find two women standing there: a mother and her daughter. They stood by the door weeping bitterly.

"What is wrong?" the *Gaon* asked them. "Our father (elderly woman's husband) leased an inn from a gentile landowner. This past winter was outrageously cold and snowy. As a result, people did not go out. Without customers, we have no income; without income, we have no rent money. The problem is: the *poritz*, landowner, accepts no excuses. He demands payment. My father was thrown into the dungeon and given an ultimatum: two days to pay – or else. One day has passed." They then proceeded to continue their incessant weeping.

The *Gaon*'s reply was, "Wait here until I return." He called his son, and they both left the house in search of funds to help this poor Jew. *Rav Akiva Eiger* covered half the city, trudging through the frigid snow, braving the biting cold wind, all for the sake of a Jew whom he did not even know. He "chanced" upon a bar (The word is in quotes because, as *frum* Jews, we know that nothing happens by chance. Indeed, the word should not be in our lexicon.). The establishment was packed with men imbibing to their heart's content. Understandably, the patrons of this bar were not the average *shul*-going, *Shabbos* observant members of the Jewish community. The *Gaon* was confronted with a quandary: Should

he enter the establishment and plead with them, attempting to appeal to their *Yiddishe neshamos*, souls, the *pinteles Yid* that we each possess? He decided that, since a Jew's life was in danger, he would take his chances.

*Rav Akiva Eiger* walked into the bar and placed himself in middle of the room. "Rabbosai, I need your help. One of our own is wallowing in a dungeon and, unless I raise the funds to redeem him, he will be tortured, and perhaps worse. Please help. Whoever saves one Jew it is considered as if he sustained the entire world!" Their wallets opened up and, within a few moments, these far from religiously observant Jews produced sufficient funds to save their brother.

The *Gaon* took their money and turned back and began admonishing them concerning their lack of observance. The men were shocked. Their leader spoke up, "First, the *Rav* empties our wallets, and then he has the temerity to give us words of *mussar*, admonishment?"

The *Gaon* replied, "It is my responsibility as *Rav* to see to it that every member of our community (Posen) follows along in the correct and righteous path. You have no idea how much I value and appreciate each and every one of you. I have enormous pain in my heart resulting from your spiritual infamy. You have distanced yourselves from Hashem, and this troubles me." With these words, *Rav Akiva Eiger* burst into bitter, uncontrolled weeping. A few minutes passed, and he added, "When I entered the bar I saw you in your degradation, I was prepared then and there to admonish you for your less than acceptable behavior. Then I recalled the words of *Chazal*, 'Just as it is a *mitzvah* to say what will be heard (and accepted), it is likewise a *mitzvah* not to say what will not be heard (*Yevamos* 65b).'" In other words, it is better not to speak/admonish when the subject will, at best, ignore you. We gain nothing by giving *mussar* to someone whom we know will not listen. Indeed, it might enrage him and distance him even further. Now that you all have merited to save a Jewish life, however, I am certain that the light of the *mitzvah* has illuminated and warmed your hearts to the point that it is incumbent upon me to arouse you to return and embrace your religious roots." The words of the *Gaon* had an impact, and a number of those in attendance altered their spiritual trajectory and became observant Jews. This goes to show that, more than what we do for the *mitzvah*, the *mitzvah* does for us.

### *Va'ani Tefillah*

כָּלּוּ כָּחֵד בָּאָרְכָּן – All of us together/all of us as one with the light of Your face.

*Horav Avigdor Miller*, zl, explains that we can have no blessing other than the light of His face, because that is the source of all blessing, both physical and spiritual. He adds that here again the principle of *middah k'neged middah*, measure for measure, comes into play. As much as man shows the light of his face to others, will he be commensurately eligible for the light of Hashem's countenance. To further explain this, I relate a question that the students of the *Alter*, zl, *m'Slabodka* posed to their revered *Rebbe*. *Horav Yisrael Salanter*, zl, was wont to say that an ethical lesson/imperative may be gleaned from everything we learn, regardless whether it is *mussar*, discourse in ethical character refinement, or it is *halachah*, Jewish law.

The students were studying the chapters in the *Talmud Shabbos* dealing with the four *reshuyos*, domains, with regard to carrying on *Shabbos* from one domain to another. They asked what *mussar* lesson can be derived from the domains. The *Alter* replied that each person has a *reshus ha'yachid*, private domain, and *reshus ha'rabit*, public domain. His public domain is his face and the countenance that he projects to others. He must always present a happy, positive, modest face to others, while his private domain, personal customs and traditions, remain private – neither imposing them on or judging others by their agreement with his manner of observance. How we act towards others is the barometer Hashem will use in the manner in which He deals with us.

*Sponsored by Mr. and Mrs. Kenny Fixler*

*in memory of his father ז"ר י'צ'ק Fixler*

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*prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum*

### Question #1: Tanner Training

"I work as a leather tanner. Should I train for a different *parnasa*, so that I can make a living after Moshiach comes?"

### Question #2: Amorphous Amphibians

"What is the difference between a toad and a frog?"

### Question #3: Lessons of Parshas Shemini

What does either of the previous two questions have to do with this week's *parshah*?

### Introduction:

Since, unfortunately, our *Beis Hamikdash* still lies in ruins, the laws of *tumah* and *taharah* do not affect our daily lives significantly. As a result, many people do not approach the study of these laws enthusiastically, and do not pay adequate attention to the *Torah* readings when they are about this topic. Yet, our prayers for Moshiach to come at any moment require us to be fully knowledgeable of the laws of *tumah* and *taharah*, so that we are prepared to observe them. As the *Gemara* teaches, in the days of *Chizkiyahu Hamelech*, they searched the entire Land of Israel, from the northern to the southern tip, and could not find a single man, woman or child who was not completely conversant in every detail of the laws of *tumah* and *taharah* (*Sanhedrin* 94b). The situation should be similar today or even better, since we have a responsibility to comprehend the weekly *parshah*, and some of these laws are discussed in *parshas Shemini*.

### Some *tumah* basics

Someone who becomes *tamei* may not enter the *Beis Hamikdash* or consume *terumah*, *ma'aser sheini*, *bikkurim* or *kodoshim*, foods that have sanctity.

The following passage of this week's *parshah* mentions eleven different categories of the laws of *tumah*, which are numbered in the selection below to facilitate explaining them afterward. The *Torah* writes:

Among animals that walk on all fours (1), anything that walks upon its forepaws\* is impure (*tamei*). Whoever touches the carcass of such an animal will be *tamei* until evening. And whoever carries their carcass must wash his clothes, and he is *tamei* until evening, because these animals are *tamei* for you.

And the following creatures that creep on the ground (2) are *tamei* for you: The weasel,\*\* the mouse, and the various species of toad. Also the hedgehog, the *ko'ach*,\*\*\* the lizard, the snail and the mole. These are *tamei* to you, among all the creeping animals – whoever touches them after they are dead will be *tamei* until evening. And anything that falls upon them after they are dead will become *tamei*, whether it is a wooden vessel (3) or a garment (4) or leather (5) or sackcloth (6) – any vessel with which work is performed (7). It must be immersed in water, and then it remains *tamei* until evening, at which point it becomes *tahor*. Furthermore, any part of them (that is, the eight *tamei* "creeping creatures") that will fall inside any earthenware vessel (8), whatever is inside it will become *tamei*, and you shall break it (that is, the earthenware vessel). And any edible food (9) that had water touch it can become *tamei*. Similarly, any liquid (10) that can be drunk will become *tamei*, if inside such a vessel. Furthermore, anything on which part of a carcass falls will become *tamei*. An oven or stove (11) should be destroyed, because they are *tamei*, and when you use them, they will be *tamei* (*Vayikra* 11:27-35).

The *Torah* describes many different types of *tumah* (spiritual contamination), each with its own laws. Every word used in this passage has a very specific meaning. Let us explore some of the laws of the different categories mentioned.

### (1) *Neveilah*

When discussing someone who touched a non-shechted animal carcass (*neveilah*), the *Torah* specifies that a person becomes *tamei* whether he touched it or carried it, but notes a halachic difference between a *neveilah* that was touched and one that was carried. Regarding carrying the carcass, which creates a status called *tumas masa*, the *Torah* says that he must wash his clothes, but omits this detail regarding one who touches the carcass, which is called *tumas maga*. We see here a difference in halachah between the person who carries a *neveilah* and one who touches it without moving it. One who carries a *neveilah*

contaminates any utensils, food or beverage susceptible to tumah that he touches while he carries it. The clothes that he wears are used by the Torah as an example of any item that he touches while carrying or moving the neveilah. This tumah is called tumah be'chiburin, meaning tumah by connection. Any keilim, utensils or appliances that now become tamei will require immersion in a mikveh or spring, and then will become tahor again at the subsequent nightfall. (There is one type of utensil that is not affected by tumah be'chiburin – earthenware vessels that were touched by a person while he carried a neveilah remain tahor. Also, tumah be'chiburin of neveilah does not contaminate people – therefore, someone touching the person who is carrying the neveilah remains tahor.) However, someone who touches a neveilah without causing it to move does not contaminate something else he touches at the same time. While he himself becomes tamei and remains tamei until he immerses in a mikveh or spring and waits until nightfall, what he touches at the time remains tahor.

#### Tanner training

At this point, let us examine our first opening question:

"I work as a leather tanner. Should I train for a different parnasah, so that I can make a living after Moshiach comes?"

The questioner realizes that someone who tans leather will make himself tamei if he handles the carcasses of animals. However, once the flesh is removed, the hide itself is not considered neveilah and does not generate tumah (see Mishnah Chullin 117b). Even should our questioner handle neveilos, he can make himself tahor through immersion in a mikveh. It is, indeed, true that he may not enter the Beis Hamikdash or consume terumah, ma'aser sheini, bikkurim or kodoshim while he is tamei, but this does not preclude his earning his livelihood in this way.

#### (2) Sheretz

The Torah lists eight creeping creatures that generate tumah if one touches them after they are dead. As the Ibn Ezra already notes, we are uncertain as to the exact identity of these eight creatures. When Eliyahu arrives, he will teach us their proper identifications, so that we can properly observe the laws. According to the translation that I provided above, which is based on Rashi and other traditional commentaries, the eight include an interesting mixture of small mammals (mostly rodents), reptiles, amphibians and mollusks. All usually lie close to the ground, and most are small. However, if the ko'ach is identified correctly as a monitor, it is the largest of the lizards and can grow as long as ten feet. If our translation is correct, other small creatures – such as snakes, frogs, insects and other rodents – are not included under the heading of tamei sheratzim. Although it may not seem aesthetically pleasing to touch live creatures or dead insects, rodents and other small animals, you do not become tamei from touching them. I recommend washing your hands

for hygienic reasons, but maintaining hygiene and becoming tamei are unrelated concepts.

By the way, the word tzav, used in Modern Hebrew for turtle, is one of the sheratzim, but means toad, according to Rashi. I have no idea who decided to use this word for turtle, but it is not consistent with halachic authorities. There is no reason to assume that a dead turtle makes one tamei.

#### Amorphous amphibians

At this point, let us refer back to one of our opening questions: "What is the difference between a toad and a frog?"

A zoologist will note several differences, but this is a halachic article. According to Rashi, a toad is one of the eight sheratzim that are tamei, and a frog is not (Taharos 5:1, 4).

#### Laws of sheratzim

Regarding the tumah of sheratzim, the Torah states that one who touches them becomes tamei, but it mentions nothing about the person's clothing requiring immersion, nor does it state that someone becomes tamei when he carries them. This is because a sheretz makes someone tamei only if he touches it, and not if he moves it without touching. Furthermore, his clothing and anything else he touches while touching the sheretz, do not become tamei, unless they are in direct physical contact with the sheretz.

#### Toad vs. frog

Why did the Torah declare only these eight creatures to be tamei, but no others?

This is a question that we can ask, but probably not answer, other than to accept the gezeiras hakasuv, the declaration of the Torah, and observe it as Hashem's will. Although we endeavor to explain the reasons for our commandments, we realize that we can never assume that we understand the reason for a mitzvah. We explore possible reasons for a mitzvah in order to enhance our experience when we observe it. We do this when we can. However, I have not found any commentary that endeavors to explain what it is about these eight specific creeping creatures, but no others, that generates tumah.

I will be continuing this topic in my next article.

#### Conclusion

This article has served as an introduction to some of the basic rules of tumah and taharah relating to neveilah and sheratzim. We hope and pray to be able to observe all of these laws soon.

\* This translation follows Malbim.

\*\* With the exception of the ko'ach, our translation follows Rashi's commentary.

\*\*\* Most commentators identify this either with the chameleon or with the monitor, both of which are varieties of lizard.

לע"נ  
שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה  
בילא בת (אריה) ליב ע"ה

## **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 "MILUIM" 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!]

## =====

## 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 akadash" /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

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- 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 HATZRAAT

... 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.

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#### 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?

## 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 Mosheh 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 Mosheh, 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 Mosheh's first words to Aharon, the stricken father:

Then Mosheh 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 Mosheh? 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 Mosheh's motivation was in uttering these words: Is he comforting Aharon? Is he, perhaps, chastising him?

Furthermore, the import of Mosheh'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 Mosheh'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, Mosheh 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 Mosheh's words), did he remain silent (in spite of Mosheh's words), or did this silence precede Mosheh'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, Mosheh turns to his nephews, commanding them to remove the corpses from

the Mishkan:

And Mosheh 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 Mosheh 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 Mosheh 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 Mosheh.

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](http://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 Vayikra 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’nuvah”)? 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 haHatat (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 haT’rumah 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 Vayikra 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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## Parshat Shemini: What is Holiness?

By Rabbi Eitan Mayer

Note: Our parasha 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 parasha), 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

### **KEDUSHAH 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."

### **KEDUSHAH 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.

### **KEDUSHAH 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-kadsh") 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.

### **KEDUSHAH 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 Leviyyim in a process described in Sefer BeMidbar. This process removed the kedusha from the firstborn and transferred it to the Leviyyim.

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 "mamlekheta 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-kadesh" -- "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. "Hullin," 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.

### **KEDUSHAH 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 kohen 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