

Potomac Torah Study Center

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Rosh Hodesh Iyar is Monday-Tuesday, April 28-29

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 more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

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

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere during 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. May the remaining hostages soon come home, hostilities cease, and a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

While Sefer Vayikra consists almost exclusively on laws, the dedication of the Mishkan is the longest exception to the legalistic focus. During the dedication, Aharon's two oldest sons, Nadav and Avihu, become so inspired and caught up when a fire from heaven comes down and burns the dedication korban (sacrifice) that they put incense on their fire pots and run up to offer their own (unauthorized) sacrifices. Another fire comes down from heaven and burns them. What should have been the climax of Aharon's life suddenly becomes his most tragic day.

During a non-leap year, we normally read Shemini during the week following Pesach. This week is very important in our family, because we have yahrzeits of five members of our family during four days, and one of those days is also Yom HaShoah, the remembrance day of the Holocaust. This year, Yom HaShoah comes a day early, on 26 Nisan, to ensure that the observance does not run into Shabbat. April 24 coincides with April 25 for parts of the world on the other side of the International Date Line, so it coincides with Anzac Day, the day that Australia, New Zealand, and Tonga observe to commemorate all Australians and New Zealanders "who served and died in all wars, conflicts, and peacekeeping operations" and "the contribution and suffering of all those who have served."

In the Potomac, MD community, we had a funeral on 25 Nisan (Wednesday) for Manny Kandel, a Holocaust survivor who had been a member of Beth Sholom for 75 years. Manny observed his Bar Mitzvah at Beth Sholom approximately 74 years ago and had been one of the most beloved members of the congregation. A former president of the congregation, Manny made a point of meeting and talking to every member and visitor to the shul. Manny was special because he made everyone he met feel special. I learned at his funeral that I was far from the only one who considered him a special friend.

In addition to mourning the loss of Manny Kandel, Hannah and I have been remembering an aunt, two cousins, and both of our mothers – five special family members with whom we had very close connections for many years. Yom HaShoah comes in the middle of all of these losses, every year right after Pesach and during the week leading up to the annual Holocaust observance at our shul. We never have a problem relating to the feelings of Aharon and all the Kohanim after the death of Nadav and Avihu.

Many commentators observe that the sin of Aharon's two oldest sons is acting on an intense desire to come close to Hashem in a way that He did not command. As Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, a king or a prophet may act

spontaneously on occasion, because they live and operate in a world of time. Kohanim, however, operate in a timeless world in which nothing changes. They must perform their religious duties exactly the same every time, exactly as Hashem dictates to Moshe, to preserve the order of God's commandments.

During a week with a funeral and yahrzeits every day, I find it difficult to focus on the positive messages of the parsha. I am glad to be back and able to put together this collection of Devrei Torah. I consider the collection this week to be very high in quality. As we count the Omer and look forward to Shavuot, may the day soon arrive when our people receive a steady stream of good news.

Shabbat Shalom.

Hannah and Alan

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. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilisa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

Haftarat Parshat Shemini: Who May Bless?

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * 5785 / 2025
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone

Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, for the refuah shlayma of the wounded, the return of those being held hostage in Gaza, and the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.

'How can it be,' David Hamelech asks in our Haftarah, 'that I live in a palace of cedar wood, while the Aron Kodesh resides in a tent?' (II Samuel 7:2). With his kingdom in a stable position following years of warfare, David feels it is time to build the Beit Hamikdash, a permanent home for the Shechina (the presence of God) constructed in glory and splendor.

But as the Haftarah continues, David learns that this vision cannot be realized through his own hands. Though initially supportive, Natan haNavi receives instruction from God to convey to David that Shlomo, his son and successor, will be the one to build the Beit Hamikdash.

While the verses from our Haftarah are somewhat opaque regarding why this task is passed on to Shlomo, David himself clarifies to his son why God did not approve of his original plan. "But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'You have

shed much blood and fought great battles; you shall not build a House for My name, for you have shed much blood on the earth in My sight.” I Chronicles 22:8.

On first reading, it would seem that the reason David is unable to build the Beit Hamikdash is that having engaged in warfare, he is unfit to build a house for the Almighty.

This same concern is cited in the context of a different halacha, rooted in the Gemara (Brachot 32b) and codified by the Rambam (Tefilah 15:3) and Shulchan Aruch (128:35): a Kohen who has killed another person is precluded from performing Birkat Kohanim. Having taken the life of another person, they are no longer fit to bless the Jewish people with well-being and peace. God, whose ways are peaceful and whose compassion extends to all living things, demands that His sacred servants and rituals be completely untainted by the taking of human lives.

In modern times, halakhic authorities have questioned whether this rule extends to soldiers serving in the IDF. If a Kohen kills in the line of duty, is he still permitted to bless the people?

After the 1982 Lebanon war, Rav She’ar Yashuv Cohen wrote an exhaustive article on this subject, concluding that the normative halakhic position is to permit a Kohen who justifiably killed someone in the context of army service to recite Birkat Kohanim. Rav Cohen cites multiple halakhic sources including Rav Ovadia Yosef (Yechaveh Daat 2:14), who brings the example of David Hamelech to distinguish between justified and unjustified bloodshed.

David, Rav Ovadia notes, was not punished for the obligatory wars he waged – those aligned with God’s will. What made David Hamelech unfit to build the Beit Hamikdash were the wars he chose to wage to expand territory beyond Israel’s defined borders before completing the conquest of the land inside of Israel.

This misaligned military priority rendered some of David’s campaigns as “*Kibbush Yachid*” (optional conquests) cf. Tosfot Gittin 8a, s.v. *Kibbush Yachid*. Such unsanctioned wars caused unwarranted death, spiritually disqualifying David from building the Beit Hamikdash. This was the blood that David recounts to his son, echoing God’s message through Natan in our Haftarah:

Further, say thus to My servant David...Moreover, I have given you [David] a great name like that of the greatest men on earth. I established a home for My people Israel [namely they are living in the land] and planted them firm, that they may dwell in place of their own and be troubled no more... I [told you David] that I will give you safety from all your enemies, and The LORD declares to you that He, the LORD, will establish a house for you.]At that point when you, David, had a palace you should have conquered the rest of Jerusalem and built the Beit Hamikdash. That was the halakhic priority. However you focused on other wars, optional wars. You spilled blood inappropriately. Therefore ...[When your days are done and you lie with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own issue, and I will establish his kingship. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish his royal throne forever.]II Samuel 7:8-14

There is a parallel today for a Kohen who kills someone fighting in an optional war; in such a case, he may be disqualified from passing on God’s blessing of well-being and peace. However, in a war which is necessary for self defense – which are all the wars that Israel has fought – halakha permits Kohanim to continue blessing Am Israel.

This was also true during the Holocaust when Jews who fought in the resistance or in the armed forces were not banned from being able to *oleh laduchan*, to bless the people. And the same also applied to the Hasmonean Kohanim at the center of the Chanukah story, who waged war to protect Jewish sovereignty and served in the Beit Hamikdash.

We yearn for the day – just as David did – when God will grant us respite from our enemies. This yearning is especially poignant at this moment, a year and a half into this war and in the days between Yom Hashoah and Yom Hazikaron.

But until such a time of complete peace comes, we continue to grapple with the weighty questions of war: how to defend ourselves without losing our moral compass; how to preserve both our body and our soul. Certainly, when necessary, we are forced to take up arms, but that is not done lightly, and never without justification. We must remain a holy nation, worthy of our Kohanim's continued blessings. With God's help, there are Solomonic days on the horizon, when God will bless and protect us, and give us peace.

* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Blander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsny.org or 212-935-8672. **Ohr Torah Stone is in the midst of its spring fund-raising drive. Please support this effort with Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.**

Shemini: Passover Never Passes Over

By Rabbi Dovid Green © 2002

Passover never really passes over. The truth is that we are really meant to pack it up and take it with us. Passover is the Holiday of Faith. It is the time that we made our first national connection with G-d. He let us know that He didn't just create the world and leave it up to random events of history. He is involved. He even took the time out of His busy schedule to make that known to Pharaoh, Egypt, and of course, to us. G-d's intervention into history is the exception which proves the rule. That is that He is always involved behind the scenes, and He is very interested in us.

Those who participated in a Pesach seder may remember that the Hagada (the Passover night liturgy), states in it that even if we were seasoned veteran Torah scholars, we would still have a commandment to relate the events of leaving Egypt. Rabbi Sholom Noach Bresovksy, of blessed memory, explains the reason for this. Recounting the events of the Exodus from Egypt is the basis of our faith in G-d. Just as G-d is unlimited, faith in G-d too has no limits – it can always rise to new levels. The knowledge of the events one may have, but the growth in our faith that we draw from this knowledge continues indefinitely. So even a well versed Torah scholar has much faith to gain from participating in a seder (a reading of the Passover liturgy) and all of its observances.

Passover teaches us that there is a G-d who is interested in us and involved in our lives. The natural conclusion then, is that we should show interest in Him.

The classical work "Chovos HaLevavos" dedicates a chapter of his work to the topic of serving G-d. His basic premise is that since we can discern so many favors which G-d constantly bestows to us in so many ways, it is only natural that we try to show our appreciation in some measure. Even though we would never be able to repay a minute fraction of the favors we receive, one would certainly be ingratious not to try. Consequently, any little bit we can do is a pleasure, as it is an opportunity for us to show our gratitude. If G-d would give me something specific to do, here's my opportunity – let me jump at the chance. That is the basis of all Torah and Mitzvah (commandment) performance. It is also notable that the Hebrew word "mitzvah" meaning "commandment" is related to the Aramaic derivation "tzavsa," meaning "togetherness." Performing commandments brings us close to G-d.

This brings us to this week's parsha. When the Tabernacle was completed, the only thing left was for G-d to bring His presence to dwell in it. On the first day of the Hebrew month of Nissan, G-d did just that. With the entire Hebrew nation witnessing, G-d's heavenly fire consumed the offerings which had been placed on the altar.

Upon witnessing this, two very great sons of Aharon the High Priest, Nadav, and Avihu, longed for closeness with G-d. As the event is recounted by the Torah, they took some of the sacrificial spices and burned them in the Holy of Holies, the most restricted and sanctified area in the Tabernacle. There G-d took their souls, and they died. Their actions are criticized by the Torah, and they died doing a sinful deed. However, the commentaries note that it was their unbridled desire to come close to G-d that got them in trouble. Their souls were drawn like magnets to G-d's presence, and they

were not protected, since their deed was not the performance of any commandment given to them. As a result, they perished. Still, their desire to be close to G-d was correct and worthy of emulation.

Now we are living in times when it is hard to take one's mind off of Jews and Jewishness. Bombs are exploding almost daily in Israel killing innocents, and making widows, widowers, orphans, and bereft parents. Synagogues are being torched in European communities. The whole world is preoccupied with Jews! We really need to take stock of where we come in to this seemingly chaotic situation. Let us start by internalizing the message of Passover. G-d runs the world. No one can hurt another person without His permission. That means that He is giving permission. Why? He's trying to tell us something. My feeling is that He wants us to develop our awareness of Him. Some One Who does so much for us should not go on being ignored. He's calling us, and the time to answer is now. Let us strengthen our awareness and desire to get close to G-d. All good things can only come from that. My personal feeling is that a lot depends on us now. Let's rise to the challenge. Prayer, performance of mitzvos, and keeping G-d in our thoughts has the potential to go a long way now. Let's do our best.

Good Shabbos!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5762-shemini/>

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

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

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

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

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

Now this comparison seems to favor Sukkot. Every day is special! Every day is unique! And, indeed, the days of Sukkot, even following yom tov, are much more exciting than the latter days of Pesach. On Sukkot something seems to be happening every day -- we sit in a sukkah, we take the lulav and esrog, each night there is a simchat beit ha'soeivah going on somewhere, we do a hoshana procession each day, and we even have a special day of Hoshana Rabbah at the end. And as for the last days of yom tov we have Shmini Atzeret with tfillat geshem, and then the big excitement of Simchat

Torah that ends the chag. As to the latter days of Pesach – what do we have? Not much. After the seder, the rest of the chag seems anti-climactic. Even the last day of Pesach doesn't have a name, doesn't have its own identity, its own special rituals. It is just *shvi'i shel Pesach*, the seventh day of Pesach, the end of a process.

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

Some people are always seeking excitement in their lives. They are looking for an experience that will stimulate their senses, that will be full of energy, that will give them a high. Such people can live very exciting lives, no doubt. But are they going anywhere with their lives? When one is seeking maximum excitement for each day, it can be hard to move forward. Moving forward requires planning, it requires laying a foundation, it requires planning how to build in a way that will last. It requires the often boring work of laying each brick on top of the previous one, so that, brick by brick, the building will finally be built and the goal will finally be reached.

It can be hard to have the patience to see such a process to completion. We want a high now! But that does not get us anywhere that is lasting and enduring.

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom!

* Rosh Yeshiva and President, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah.

From my archives.

Sacred Places: Thoughts for Parashat Shemini

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

he Torah devotes many verses to describing the building and dedication of the Mishkan, the Israelites' sanctuary during their 40 years in the wilderness. The Mishkan and its service served as the prototype for the later Temples built in Jerusalem in ancient Israel.

The emphasis on the Mishkan underscores an important aspect of religious life. While God cannot be limited to a particular space, yet, human beings can set aside a place and recognize it to be sacred, a point of connection between humans and the Almighty. Human understanding cannot confront the vastness of God without being overcome with overwhelming fear and trembling. But a sacred space, being limited and comprehensible, enables us to feel a sense of personal connection with God.

Of course, the entire universe is sacred since it is a manifestation of God's will and power. Yet, by designating a special sanctity to specific places, the religious person creates a new spiritual reality, a new gate to heaven. Sacred and non-sacred space may appear objectively to be the same; but within the mind of a religious person, they are different kinds of worlds.

Buildings dedicated to prayer and the study of Torah are considered by Judaism to be sacred places. The world inside these structures is qualitatively different from the world outside.

The Shulhan Arukh has a special section on the sanctity of the synagogue (Orah Hayyim 151). The laws indicate the separateness and specialness that mark this sacred space. It is forbidden to act in a light-headed fashion in synagogues and study halls. Silly laughter, extraneous conversation, eating and drinking are forbidden in the synagogue. One is not supposed to use the synagogue as a short-cut, or as a place to protect oneself from the sun or rain — synagogues are holy precincts not to be used for one's personal comfort and convenience.

People who understand the profound significance of the sanctity of the synagogue enter its precincts with awe and reverence. They pray quietly and thoughtfully. They dress and act with the gravity appropriate to being in the presence of God in a uniquely sacred space. They appreciate the precious spiritual opportunity presented to them by worshiping in a holy place.

The Torah records the dream of our forefather Jacob, in which he saw a ladder connecting heaven and earth, with angels ascending and descending its rungs. When he awoke from his dream, Jacob said: *“Surely the Lord is in the place, and I knew it not.”* Jacob was amazed by his new-found insight: *“How full of awe is this place. This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of Heaven”* (Bereishith 28-16-19).

The ladder in Jacob's dream symbolizes the connection between the physical world and the spiritual world, between the finitude of matter and the infinity of spirit. These two seemingly opposite domains are connected and related to each other.

Synagogues, like the ladder in Jacob's dream, serve to connect heaven and earth. They are sacred spaces that are meant to inspire us with the eternal grandeur of the Almighty and to stir within us spiritual longings and dreams.

But the sanctity of synagogues — and all other holy places — is only experienced by those who are spiritually awake. To all others, synagogues are simply buildings like all other buildings.

Sanctity is very much in the eyes of the beholder.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/sacred-places-thoughts-parashat-shemini-april-6-2013>

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The Jews of Rhodes and Cos: In Memoriam

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

[Special posting for Yom HaShoah, Thursday, April 24]

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.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City. Rabbi Angel is a descendant of Jews of Rhodes. His doctoral dissertation (and first book) was a history of the Jews of Rhodes.

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/jews-rhodes-and-cos-memoriam>

Shimini: It's How You Play the Game

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

Dedicated in Memory of Mr. David Rhine Sholomo Dovid ben Avraham Yitzchak z.l.

May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel

It was the inauguration day of the Mishkan and emotions were running high. After weeks of recovery from the Eigel incident, the Jewish people had been instructed to build a Sanctuary through which atonement would be evident and the people could connect with Hashem. The excitement was deep as they witnessed Hashem accept their offerings.

In this environment of closeness and excitement, two of Aharon's sons brought an unauthorized offering, were punished and died. Aharon and his living sons were now in the status of bereavement, and according to the laws of Kehuna were forbidden to eat from the Korbanos. Yet, Moshe bore special instructions to them that they were to eat from the offerings of this special inauguration day.

What followed was astounding.

Moshe noticed that although Aharon and his sons had indeed eaten the special Korbanos, they did not eat the Korban of Rosh Chodesh, which was also brought on this day. Instead, they burned it. Moshe confronted them and asked why they had not followed the instructions to eat the Korbanos. Aharon responded that the instruction to eat had only been given regarding the special Korbanos of the inauguration day. But the Korban of Rosh Chodesh, which was not unique to the inauguration, had to be burned because all the Kohanim were in mourning.

Moshe acknowledged that Aharon was correct. But then he did more. The Medrash Rabboh (13) tells us that Moshe announced to the people that he had made a mistake, and that Aharon corrected him. In fact, the Torah concludes the section by telling us, “*Vayitev Bieinov*,” It was good in Moshe’s eyes. Moshe was very satisfied with how things turned out. We wonder, why wasn’t it sufficient for Moshe to simply acknowledge that Aharon was correct. Why did he need to announce all of this to the people, and what was so good about being wrong and corrected?

Rabbi Yisroel Salanter was an exceptional Torah scholar who chose as his life’s work to promote the development of good Middos. His efforts were successful. For many critical years in Jewish history, there was a powerful network of Yeshivos known as “*Mussar Yeshivos*,” which emphasized internal strength so well that they successfully withstood the pressures of Haskala and Communism. Eventually, Mussar and the legacy of Reb Yisroel Salanter, were incorporated into the standard studies of all Yeshivos.

On one occasion, Reb Yisroel Salanter was invited to speak in the main Shul of a town that was resistant to the Mussar movement and its emphasis on ethics and character development. Reb Yisroel’s supporters hoped that when Reb Yisroel gave a brilliant Shiur it would be evident that his movement was grounded in Torah and should be accepted.

Reb Yisroel indeed harnessed his brilliance and prowess in Torah and gave an astounding shiur. Towards the end of the shiur, as all the concepts were coming together, someone posed a question which uprooted Reb Yisroel’s core principle. Reb Yisroel stood still for a few moments and then declared, “*He is correct. I was mistaken.*” Reb Yisroel proceeded to sit down without completing the Shiur.

Later, Reb Yisroel shared, “*I had at least three ways to respond to the question, but I knew that they were not the truth. He asked a good question which contradicted my premise. For a moment I considered giving one of the answers which would most likely have satisfied him, for the sake of the Mussar movement being accepted. But I realized that one cannot build Torah or Mussar with deception, so I just acknowledged that he was right and sat down.*”

This was the lesson that Moshe wanted to teach the people by personal example. It doesn’t feel good to be bested by someone else. Sometimes we will argue our position well after it is no longer useful or in our best interest. But for someone like Moshe, who valued truth above all, the fact that he made a mistake and was corrected was a G-dsend. It was an opportunity for Moshe to acknowledge and to publicly announce with joy that he was corrected. To Moshe there was nothing more joyous than being saved from a mistaken ruling.

One of the greatest lessons I ever learned came in the form of such an episode. I was learning with my Rebbe, and he read a Talmud passage quickly in a way that I felt was incorrect. I gently pointed out that I did not think that was what the Talmud was saying. He listened closely to what I said, thought a moment, and then boldly declared, “*You are right, and I am wrong.*”

Please trust me when I say that I had no pleasure in besting our beloved Rebbe. He used no diplomacy, no hedging, no softening or excuses as to why his approach could have been the explanation. It was so raw. Just plain, “*You were right, and I was wrong.*” For me, it was an intensely humbling experience. I was in the presence of someone who, like Moshe and Reb Yisroel Salanter, had eliminated personal ego from the learning experience. What was left was an intense desire for truth and accuracy. On that day, in a very personal way, I experienced the joy of truth and of being corrected. It was the lesson Moshe wanted to share with the people because it is one of the greatest lessons possible.

Those who study Torah and those who are focused on successful relationships can well identify with the saying, “*It’s not if you win or lose, it’s how you play the game.*”

With heartfelt blessings for a wonderful Shabbas.

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.

Shemini – Kosher: Food For Thought

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * (2022)

One of the most well-known aspects of Jewish life is the complex, unique laws of Kosher. In addition to the laws of milk and meat, there are restrictions as to which animals we may eat from. Land animals must have split hooves and chew their cud, and fish must have fins and scales. There is also a specific list of kosher birds and even a short list of specific bugs which are acceptable. The Torah does not give us any clear, explicit reason for these guidelines or what differentiates these animals from others.

The Ralba"g (Vayikra 11:8) offers a fascinating insight into some of the laws of kosher. He explains that when G-d chose us to be His people, He assigned us to be a nation of wise and understanding people. In line with this role, G-d commanded us to choose foods which would be in keeping with this purpose and to stay away from foods which could hamper this purpose. Specifically, G-d wanted us to avoid foods which would strengthen the physical, earthly characteristics of mankind and deaden the sharpness of the intellect. Just as when we eat a large meal we feel physically tired, so too, physical foods have a spiritual component which can make us spiritually tired. Some foods are denser and more earthen in their spiritual components. Eating those foods and incorporating them into our system can make us more focused on the earthly, physical aspects of life and less attuned to the finer nuances of intellectual pursuits and spirituality.

This, he explains, is the reason why we are enjoined to only eat animals who chew their cud. The fact that animals chew their cud is a sign that their life-force requires more refined food. These animals are made of a spiritual essence that is less earthen and physical. To properly sustain their life force, they therefore require food that is more refined and less dense or earthen in its makeup. For this reason, Hashem created them in a way that they do not absorb nutrients directly from physical matter as other animals might. They were given multiple stomachs for digestion to refine and loosen their food, weakening the physical bonds within their food and thereby making them less dense and more spiritual. To further increase this effect, these animals regurgitate their food and chew it again during the digestive process.

The Ralba"g later explains (ibid. 12) that the fins and scales on kosher fish are an expression of the same concept. The scales are a stronger layer of protection than regular fish skin. This is indicative that the fish itself is less dense and substantive and more prone to being damaged by external factors. (He notes, that this concept is unique to scales and should not be applied to a hard shell, where the thick shell is mystically symbolic of a particularly dense and earthen flesh underneath.) He notes that fins are also indicative of the refined makeup of the fish, as fins assist the fish to move more quickly and more easily through the water. As with all exercise, the increased movement of the fish wears away any excess physicality.

It is for these reasons that these signs were chosen for kosher food. The signs themselves hint at one of the purposes of eating kosher – that we be able to maintain ourselves as wise and understanding beings. This is so critical to who we are as Jews, that Hashem incorporated these laws into the very fabric of our daily lives, ensuring that we don't allow for any unnecessary weakening of our capacity for thought and insight.

We live in a world which is driven by results and productivity. It is a very busy world, where we often struggle to find the time to stop and reflect and consider our lives, our environment, where we came from and where we are going in life. Wisdom and understanding do not come of their own accord. They can only be gained through taking time to stop and carefully consider the things we've learned in life, the experiences we've had and the environment and reality that we know. The Ralba"g teaches us that the laws of Kosher are a constant reminder of how precious thought and reflection are, and that we must make time to stop and think.

* Co-founder of the Rhode Island Torah Network in Providence, RI. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD., and associated with the Savannah Kollel.

Shemini – Parasha Pointers

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

1. The inauguration of the Mishkan took eight days]Lev. 9:1[. Consider the appearances of cycles of seven and eight in the biblical calendar and in events and rituals. Question to ponder: What do the numbers seven and eight represent in the Torah?
2. The number seven appears in the creation of the world, Shabbat, Pesah, seven weeks leading to Shavuot, Shavuot itself, Sukkot, the seven-year Shemita cycle, and seven times seven years leading to the jubilee year. It also appears in many sets of sacrifices, blood-sprinkling on the altar, and the seven branches of the Menorah.
3. The number eight appears in Berit Milah, the inauguration of the Mishkan, Shemini Atzeret, and the purification process of the leper.
4. Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon, are struck and killed for bringing an alien fire]10:1-2[. The commentators debate the reason for their punishment. The following paragraph is a warning against entering the Mishkan while drunk]10:8-11[. It seems that Nadav and Avihu were drinking wine to achieve a joyous state of mind. Using external substances for such a purpose is detrimental and dangerous. The spiritual experience should be internal and not one which is achieved by substance abuse.
5. This also explains why the warning against serving in the Mishkan while drunk is followed by this description of the Kohen's role, which is to distinguish between the holy and unholy, the pure and impure, and teach the laws of God to the Israelites. The power of distinction evaporates when one is drunk, and the drunkard cannot be an educator or an inspirational guide, which is the principal purpose of the Kohanim.
6. Aharon and his surviving sons are instructed to carry on with the inauguration and let the rest of the nation mourn the death of Nadav and Avihu]10:6-7[. This seems very harsh, and there is no doubt that it required a tremendous sacrifice for Aharon and his sons to obey that order. This perhaps could be analogized to an extremely important mission in which some of the crew members lost their lives. The survivors must keep the momentum and bring the mission to fruition.
7. Moshe loses his temper and rebukes Aharon for not eating of the meat of a certain sacrifice. Aharon calmly responds that in light of the tragedy that befell him, eating of that sacrifice would be inappropriate. Moshe accepts Aharon's explanation]10:16-20[. We learn for this that even when the program is created by God, there is room for last-minute changes made by people on the ground.
8. In chapter 11]1-47[we have an extensive list of kosher and non-kosher animals. Keeping the laws of Kashrut helps us in several ways. We are aware of what we eat and inquire about its origin. We learn to delay gratification]see *The Marshmallow Test*, by Walter Mischel[. Sparing some of the non-kosher animals is also important for the ecology since they are nature's sanitary corps.

Enjoy reading and learning.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(. Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:**

<https://www.sefaria.org/profile/aim-ovadia?tab=sheets> . The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Many Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright protections for this material.

From Pesach on the Road to Shavuot

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Nadav and Avihu died because they loved God's service so much, they went overboard and disregarded their own safety. During the height of the celebrations of the Tabernacle, Nadav and Avihu got riled up and desired to bring incense into the Holy of Holies, a place that only the High Priest could go in once a year. They went in thinking they were doing a mitzvah. However they forgot that inspiration needs to be tempered by responsibility.

It's a good thing to keep in mind as we head away from Pesach. We all worked so hard to create a spiritual experience for ourselves and our families at the Seder. We spent money, many hours in the kitchen and much time planning to ensure everything went exactly as we wanted. Not only that, but we spent an entire week without eating our favourite treats like Sam's Bagels.

But learning from Nadav and Avihu, now is the time where we relax and come down a little bit. We experienced heavy inspiration over the past week and it's important we now relax and settle into a more comfortable routine. We need to descend the mountain carefully so we can climb the next one on Shavuot.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel)Birmingham, AL(. I reprinted part 1 last week for Mishpatim.

Rav Kook Torah

Shemini: Rabbi Yehudah and the Calf

Rabbi Yehudah's Mistake

For thirteen years, Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi, the famed redactor of the Mishnah, suffered from terrible pain. The Talmud)Baba Metzia 85b(traces his suffering to the following incident:

A calf was once led to slaughter. Sensing what was about to take place, the animal fled to Rabbi Yehudah. It hung its head on the corner of his garment and wept.

The rabbi told the calf, "Go! You were created for this purpose."

It was decreed in Heaven: since Rabbi Yehudah failed to show compassion to the calf, the rabbi should suffer from afflictions. Rabbi Yehudah was only healed many years later, when he convinced his maid servant not to harm small rodents she discovered in the house.

Why was the rabbi punished so severely for showing insensitivity to the calf?

Permission to Eat Meat

"It demonstrates an overall moral deficiency in our humanity," Rav Kook wrote, *"when we are unable to maintain the proper and lofty emotion — Ja natural aversion[to taking the life of a living creature for our needs and pleasures."*

Moreover, Rabbi Yehudah was wrong. Animals were not created just to be slaughtered.

Most prohibitions are constant; they are forbidden for all time. That, however, is not true with regard to eating meat. In this case, we may delineate four distinct stages in the ethical development of humanity.

1. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were not allowed to kill animals for food. That lofty state of vegetarianism, Rav Kook wrote, is in fact the natural and correct order of the world.
2. After the Flood, in the time of Noah, eating meat was permitted)Sanhedrin 59b(. This change was for the physical and moral betterment of humanity.

Rabbi Yosef Albo)c. 1380-1444(wrote that the original prohibition to eat meat led indirectly to the murder of humans. People concluded that *"The fate of human beings is like that of the animals.... All have the same spirit; man has no superiority over the beast"*)Ecc. 3:19(. God permitted the consumption of meat to highlight the difference between killing a human being and killing an animal)Sefer Ha-Ikarim 3:16(.

Blurring the distinction between human and animal life impedes humanity's moral and spiritual development. A sense of commonality with the animals begets legitimization for a lawless, uncontrolled lifestyle and animalistic conduct.

3. With the Torah's revelation at Sinai, a third stage commenced. The laws of kashrut provide steps to minimize the negative repercussions of consuming meat.

The Torah prohibits predatory animals and birds of prey, due to the concern that we may be influenced by their violent traits, by eating them and frequent contact with them — the unavoidable result of raising them for food. And the laws of shehitah are meant to ensure that death will be swift and reduce the animal's anguish.

4. There will be a future era, Rav Kook wrote, when humanity will return to the lofty state of the Garden of Eden. Eating meat will be forbidden once again. This is the wonderful vision described by the prophets:

"The cow will graze with the bear, their young will lie down together; and the lion will eat straw like cattle... They will neither harm nor destroy in all of My holy mount.")Isaiah 11:6-9(

In this future world, the Kabbalists wrote, the animals will be elevated to a higher state, and they will no longer serve as food for humans.

Rabbi Yehudah's response to the calf was wrong. The slaughterhouse is not the calf's ultimate destiny. On the contrary, as the rabbi told his maid servant thirteen years later, *"God's compassion extends to all of His creations"*)Psalms 145:9(.

)Adapted from *Afikim BaNegev*, chapter 6.(

<https://ravkooktorah.org/SHEMINI-78.htm>

Limits (Shemini 5780)

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

The story of Nadav and Avihu, Aharon's two eldest sons who died on the day the Sanctuary was dedicated, is one of the most tragic in the Torah. It is referred to on no less than four separate occasions. It turned a day that should have been a national celebration into one of deep grief. Aharon, bereaved, could not speak. A sense of mourning fell over the camp and the people. God had told Moshe that it was dangerous to have the Divine Presence within the camp)Ex. 33:3(, but even Moshe could not have guessed that something as serious as this could happen. What did Nadav and Avihu do wrong?

An exceptionally broad range of interpretations have been given by the Sages. Some say that they aspired to lead the people and were impatiently waiting for Moshe and Aharon to die. Others say that their sin was that they never married, considering all women to be unworthy of them. Others attribute their sin to intoxication. Others again say that they did not seek guidance as to what they should do and what they were not permitted to do on this day. Yet another explanation is that they entered the Holy of Holies, which only the High Priest was permitted to do.

The simplest explanation, though, is the one given explicitly in the text. They offered "*strange fire that was not commanded*." Why should they have done such a thing? And why was it so serious an error?

The explanation that makes most sense psychologically is that they were carried away by the mood of the moment. They acted in a kind of ecstasy. They were caught up by the sheer excitement of the inauguration of the first collective house of worship in the history of Avraham's children. Their behaviour was spontaneous. They wanted to do something extra, uncommanded, to express their religious fervour.

What was wrong with that? Moshe had acted spontaneously when he broke the tablets after the sin of the Golden Calf. Centuries later, David would act spontaneously when he danced as the Ark was brought into Jerusalem. Neither of them was punished for their behaviour,)although Michal did reprimand her husband David after his dance(. But what made Nadav and Avihu deserve so severe a punishment?

The difference was that Moshe was a Prophet. David was a King. But Nadav and Avihu were Priests. Prophets and Kings sometimes act spontaneously, because they both inhabit the world of time. To fulfil their functions, they need a sense of history. They develop an intuitive grasp of time. They understand the mood of the moment, and what it calls for. For them, today is not yesterday, and tomorrow will be different again. That leads them, from time to time, to act spontaneously because that is what the moment requires.

Moshe knew that only something as dramatic as shattering the tablets would bring the people to their senses and convey to them how grave was their sin. David knew that dancing alongside the Ark would express to the people a sense of the significance of what was happening, that Jerusalem was about to become not just the political capital but also the spiritual centre of the nation. These acts of precisely judged spontaneity were essential in shaping the destiny of the people.

But Priests have a different role altogether. They inhabit a world that is timeless, ahistorical, in which nothing significant changes. The daily, weekly and yearly sacrifices were always the same. Every element of the service of the Tabernacle was bound by its own detailed rules, and nothing of significance was left to the discretion of the Priest.

The Priest was the guardian of order. It was his job to maintain boundaries, between sacred and secular, pure and impure, perfect and blemished, permitted and forbidden. His domain was that of the holy, the points at which the infinite and

eternal enter the world of the finite and mortal. As God tells Aharon in our parsha: “*You must distinguish between the sacred and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean; and you must teach the Israelites all the laws which the Lord has imparted to them through Moshe.*” The key verbs for the Kohen were lehavdil, to distinguish, and lehorot, to teach. The Kohen made distinctions and taught the people to do likewise.

The priestly vocation was to remind the people that there are limits. There is an order to the universe and we must respect it. Spontaneity has no place in the life of the Priest or the service of the Sanctuary. That is what Nadav and Avihu failed to honour. It might have seemed like a minor transgression but it was in fact a negation of everything the Tabernacle and the Priesthood stood for.

There are limits. That is what the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is about. Why would God go to the trouble of creating two trees, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge, from which human beings are forbidden to eat? Why tell the humans what the trees were and what their fruit could do? Why expose them to temptation? Who would not wish to have knowledge and eternal life if they could acquire them by merely eating a fruit? Why plant these trees in a garden where the humans could not but help see them? Why put Adam and Eve to a test they were unlikely to pass?

To teach them, and us, that even in Eden, Utopia, Paradise, there are limits. There are certain things we can do, and would like to do, that we must not do.

The classic example is the environment. As Jared Diamond has documented in his books, *Guns, Germs and Steel*, and *Collapse*, almost wherever human beings have set foot, they have left a trail of destruction in their wake. They have farmed lands to exhaustion and hunted animals to extinction. They have done so because they have not had, embedded in their minds and habits, the notion of limits. Hence the concept, key to environmental ethics, of sustainability, meaning limiting your exploitation of the Earth’s resources to the point where they can renew themselves. A failure to observe those limits causes human beings to be exiled from their own garden of Eden.

We have been aware of threats to the environment and the dangers of climate change for a long time, certainly since the 1970s. Yet the measures humanity has taken to establish limits to consumption, pollution, the destruction of habitats and the like have, for the most part, been too little, too late. A 2019 BBC survey of moral attitudes in Britain showed that despite the fact that a majority of people felt responsibility for the future of the planet, this had not translated into action. 71 percent of people thought that it is acceptable to drive when it would be just as easy to walk. 65 percent of people thought it acceptable to use disposable cutlery and plates.]1[

In *The True and Only Heaven*, Christopher Lasch argued that the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment endowed us with the belief that there are no limits, that science and technology will solve every problem they create and the earth will continue indefinitely to yield its bounty. “*Progressive optimism rests, at bottom, on a denial of the natural limits on human power and freedom, and it cannot survive for very long in a world in which an awareness of those limits has become inescapable.*”]2[Forget limits and eventually we lose paradise. That is what the story of Adam and Eve warns.

In a remarkable passage in his 1976 book on inflation, *The Reigning Error*, William Rees-Mogg waxed eloquent about the role of Jewish law in securing Jewish survival. It did so by containing the energies of the people – Jews are, he said, “a people of an electric energy, both of personality and of mind.” Nuclear energy, he says, is immensely powerful but at the same time needs to be contained. He then says this:

In the same way, the energy of the Jewish people has been enclosed in a different type of container, the law. That has acted as a bottle inside which the spiritual and intellectual energy could be held; only because it could be held has it been possible to make use of it. It has not merely exploded or been dispersed; it has been harnessed as a continuous power ... Contained energy can be a driving force over an indefinite period; uncontrolled energy is merely a big and usually destructive bang. In human nature only disciplined energy is effective.]3[

That was the role of the Kohen, and it is the continuing role of halachah. Both are expressions of limits: rules, laws and distinctions. Without limits, civilisations can be as thrilling and short-lived as fireworks. To survive they need to find a way of containing energy so that it lasts, undiminished. That was the Priest's role and what Nadav and Avihu betrayed by introducing spontaneity where it does not belong. As Rees-Mogg said, "*uncontrolled energy is merely a big and usually destructive bang.*"

I believe that we need to recover a sense of limits because, in our uncontrolled search for ever greater affluence, we are endangering the future of the planet and betraying our responsibility to generations not yet born. There are such things as fruit we should not eat, and fire we should not bring.

FOOTNOTES:

]1[<https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2019/year-of-beliefs-morality-ethics-survey-2019>.

]2[Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and its Critics*, WW Norton, 1991, 530.

]3[William Rees-Mogg, *The Reigning Error: The Crisis of World Inflation*, Hamish Hamilton, 1974, 12.

Around the Shabbat Table"

1. Why do you think there are so many different explanations for what Nadav and Avihu's sin was?
2. Why must we be cautious with religious spontaneity? How do religious rules and laws help?
3. How can we apply this message about the importance of limits to our own lives?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/shemini/limits/> 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.

Life Lessons From the Parshah - Shemini: The Amazing Number Eight

By Yehoshua B. Gordon, z"l * © Chabad 2025

The word shemini, which is the title of this week's parshah, translates as "eighth" in Hebrew.

Towards the end of last week's parshah, Tzav, we read about the Seven Days of Consecration. These seven days commenced on the 23rd of Adar in the year 2449, almost a year after the Exodus from Egypt. During this period, Moses erected and dismantled the Tabernacle and performed the prescribed service i.e., brought all the offerings(each day).

In contemporary language, we'd call this week a "practice run." Moses assumed the role of the High Priest throughout these seven days, and Aaron played the part of the customer.

One of the final verses of Tzav states, "*And you shall not leave the entrance of the Tent of Meeting for seven days, until the day of the completion of your investiture days; he will inaugurate you for seven days.*"¹ The opening verse of Shemini reads, "*And it was on the eighth)shemini(day that Moses summoned Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel.*"²

This "eighth day," which served as the Tabernacle's Opening Day, fell on the first day of the month of Nisan, also known as "*the month of miracles.*" It marked a transformation into the realm of the miraculous, as remarkable events unfolded. It

was the first day of offerings; the first instance of fire descending from heaven onto the Altar; the first time that the Shechinah — the Divine Presence — dwelled in the Tabernacle.

Seven: Nature's Rhythm

G d created the universe in six days, and on the seventh day, Shabbat, He rested. We find that so much of Jewish life, and life in general, is related to the number seven: from the seven days of the week, to the seven years of the Sabbatical cycle, to the grand Jubilee cycle spanning 49 years, consisting of seven Sabbatical cycles. Even the rainbow boasts seven distinct colors. Passover, the festival commemorating the Exodus from Egypt, is observed over a seven-day period according to biblical instruction, as is the festival of Sukkot.

Transcending Nature

In the teachings of Chassidism, the number seven signifies the natural world and the perfection that is attainable within its bounds. The number eight, by contrast, symbolizes that which is beyond nature and its inherent limitations. Eight is otherworldly; it is miraculous; it transcends the confines of creation.³ [emphasis added]

And that is why it was on the eighth day that the physical world transcended its limitations and became holy enough to be a dwelling — an abode — for G d Almighty.

Thus, while everything natural and normative in life and in Judaism is connected to the number seven, everything transcendent in Jewish life is connected to the number eight.

For instance, in next week's parshah, Tazria, we will read, "*If a woman conceives and gives birth to a male ... on the eighth)shemini(day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.*"⁴ The brit milah is performed on the eighth day (health permitting). Why not the seventh? Because the covenant, the bond between the Jew and G d, is not natural — it is otherworldly. Our connection to G d transcends logic — it is suprarational. Therefore, the circumcision is done on the eighth day and never before.

A New Festival

The Festival of Sukkot spans seven days, and during Temple times, the Jewish people offered 70 bulls as additional sacrifices throughout the holiday, corresponding to the 70 nations of the world. Each day, the number of sacrifices dwindled: 13 on the first day, 12 on the second, and so forth, until the seventh day, when 7 bulls were offered, totaling 70. These seven days were dedicated to invoking blessings upon every other nation on earth.

Then comes the unexpected twist. "*The eighth)shemini(day shall be a time of restriction for you.*"⁵ On this eighth day — following the seven-day Sukkot festival — G d essentially declares, "*Just when you thought it's over and you're going home, behold, I am proclaiming a new festival!*"

This festival, Shemini Atzeret, is actually considered a new festival. During candle-lighting and Kiddush on Shemini Atzeret, we recite the blessing of shehecheyanu, thanking G d for bringing us to this milestone. If this were merely the eighth day of Sukkot, we could not say this blessing.

How many bulls were offered as additional sacrifices on this day? Just one. G d tells the Jewish people, "*This day is devoted exclusively to you. For seven days, we have done everything we could to bring blessings to the world at large. But now it's your turn. This is your day. On this day the Jewish people will receive blessings.*"

One sacrifice for the one nation chosen by the One G d. And when does this unique festival occur? On the eighth day!

Eight Days of Light

Another profound demonstration of the transcendent number eight is found in the Chanukah miracle.

To briefly recap: In the second century BCE, the Holy Land was ruled by the Syrian-Greeks who sought to impose Greek culture and beliefs upon the Jewish people. Against overwhelming odds, a small band of faithful Jews, led by Judah Maccabee, emerged victorious, defeating the Syrian-Greek army and reclaiming the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Upon rededicating the Temple to the service of G d, they discovered only a single cruse of olive oil that remained untainted by the Greeks. With this meager supply, they kindled the Menorah, and miraculously, the one-day supply of pure oil lasted for eight days, until fresh olive oil could be prepared under conditions of ritual purity.

That is why we commemorate Chanukah with the number eight — eight days and eight lights. The miracle of Chanukah was so extraordinary, so beyond the natural order, that it's no coincidence that the miracle lasted eight days.

The period leading up to the Chanukah miracle was one of intense darkness for the Jewish people. On Chanukah, we kindle the menorah, flooding the world with the illuminating energy of the miraculous number eight.

The Rebbe, therefore, instructed his disciples, not to suffice with lighting the Chanukah lights at the windows or doors in our homes, or even in our synagogues. Instead, he urged us to bring the message of Chanukah's light to the entire world. Why? Because the number eight has the ability to saturate the world with otherworldly miracles, to infuse it with infinite Divine energy.

Moshiach's Day

Biblically, the festival of Passover lasts for seven days. By rabbinic ordinance, however, an additional day of observance is added in the Diaspora, outside of the land of Israel. And so, we have an eighth day of Passover.

What is the theme of this day? Moshiach. It signifies the imminent end of our bitter exile and the arrival of Moshiach, who will usher in an era of peace and tranquility, and an end to terror, illness, and all things negative. All of this is symbolized by the eighth day of Passover.

The haftarah that we read on this day is the famous passage from Isaiah envisioning the era of Moshiach, a time when *“the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie with the kid goat; the calf and the young lion will graze together, and a young lad shall lead them.”*⁶

Following a tradition instituted by the Baal Shem Tov, the waning hours of the eighth day of Passover are dedicated to Seudat Moshiach, a feast celebrating the Divine revelation in messianic times. This special meal is devoted to the belief that Moshiach's arrival is imminent.

Again, we find that this unique, special day is on the eighth day.

On a personal note, my father and teacher, Rabbi Sholom B. Gordon, of blessed memory, would often share these teachings about the significance and symbolism of shemini and the number eight.

I vividly recall him discussing the significance of the brit milah being on the eighth day, and the additional Sukkot holiday, Shemini Atzeret, occurring on the eighth day. However, in my father's teachings, the greatest illustration of the transcendent quality of the number eight was the eighth day of Passover — Moshiach's day — because, in his words, *“There is nothing more important than preparing the world and awaiting the coming of Moshiach.”*

When, then, did G d choose for my father to return his soul to Him? Which day would Divine Providence have us observe his yahrtzeit? On the eighth day of Passover.

His tombstone, borrowing from the Rebbe's words in the Hayom Yom entry of that day, fittingly states that he passed away on the eighth day of Passover, the day on which *“the radiance of the light of Moshiach shines openly.”*⁷

Eight-Stranded Harp

Chapter 12 of Psalms opens with, *“For the conductor on the sheminit, a song of David.”* Rashi explains that the sheminit is a harp with eight strings. This instrument, by virtue of its eight strings, is related to Moshiach. In the era of Moshiach — a level of consciousness that King David attained at times — the Levites will play an eight-stranded harp, for at that time we will all achieve a connection to the Divine that is infinite, higher than our present nature-bound reality characterized by the limited energy represented by seven.

I always found it interesting that the mathematical symbol for infinity resembles an eight on its side, a neat reminder of the transcendence embodied by this number.

While the world we live in is governed by the rules of nature, we must always remember that these rules do not limit the Jew: From the outset, a Jew enters the Covenant of Circumcision on the eighth day. The birth of the Jewish nation is marked by Passover, which reaches its apex on the eighth day — the day of Moshiach. Sukkot features an additional festival on the eighth day — a day of miracles solely for the Jewish people. Chanukah, in its entirety, embodies the energy and light of the number eight. And when Moshiach comes, the entire world will be transformed into the transcendent realm of the miraculous number eight.

By the laws of nature, as much as we ought to feel overwhelmed, for *“in every generation they rise up against us to destroy us,”* and as dark and dismal as our reality may appear at times, the Jewish people must always bear in mind that G d — with the miracle of eight — *“saves us from their hands.”*⁸

May we merit to see the greatest miracle of all — an end to terror, war, suffering, illness, and all negativity — as we usher in the era of the eighth day, with the arrival of our righteous Moshiach and the rebuilding of Holy Temple, may it be speedily in our days. Amen.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Leviticus 8:33.
2. Leviticus 9:1.
3. Kli Yakar to Vayikra 8:33.
4. Leviticus 12:2-3.
5. Numbers 29:35.
6. Isaiah 11:6.
7. *Hayom Yom*, entry for 22 Nissan.
8. Passover Haggadah.

* Rabbi Yehoshua Gordon directed Chabad of the Valley in Tarzana, CA until his passing in 2016. Adapted by Rabbi Mottel Friedman from classes and sermons that Rabbi Gordon presented in Encino, CA and broadcast on Chabad.org. "Life Lessons from the Parshah" is a project of the Rabbi Joshua B. Gordon Living Legacy Fund, benefiting the 32 centers of Chabad of the Valley, published by Chabad of the Valley and Chabad.org.

Shemini: Preparing for Miracles

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnfsky *

During the week of 23–29 Adar 2449, Moses performed the sacrificial rites designed to install Aaron and his sons as priests.

On the eighth day, 1 Nisan, it was time for Aaron to officiate for the first time as high priest and his sons as regular priests.

Preparing for Miracles

An ox and a ram as peace-offerings, to slaughter before G-d, and a grain-offering kneaded with oil, for today G-d is appearing to you.)Lev. 9:4(

There are natural levels of Divine revelation – whether Divine beneficence or Divine consciousness – that we can elicit. The Torah is the “*instruction manual*” that G-d gave us in order to show us how to live life in the way that elicits His beneficence and enables us to sense His presence in our lives.

However, there are also supranatural levels of Divine revelation, which are beyond our ability to elicit. The prime example of this type of revelation was that which occurred on the final, eighth day of the installation rites for the Tabernacle, when G-d completed the inauguration of the Tabernacle by revealing His presence within it. This revelation of Divinity was far too intense to be elicited by anything any human being could possibly do. Nonetheless, since G-d did not want us to feel unworthy of this revelation, He prescribed certain rites for this day, more as a “*gift*” for us to give Him than an obligation to fulfill.

In this way, G-d taught us that when we observe His commandments in fulfillment of our obligations toward Him, we elicit natural levels of Divine revelation, but when we give Him the “*gift*” of going beyond what He requires of us, we elicit supranatural levels of Divine revelation.

--From Kehot's *Daily Wisdom 3*

* An insight by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on parshat Va'eira from our *Daily Wisdom 3* by Rabbi Moshe Wisnfsky.

May G-d grant wisdom, strength and peace in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Spontaneity: Good or Bad?

Shemini tells the tragic story of how the great inauguration of the Tabernacle, a day about which the Sages said that God rejoiced as much as He had at the creation of the universe, was overshadowed by the death of two of Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu:

"Aaron's sons Nadav and Avihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorised fire before the Lord, which [God] had not instructed them [to offer]. Fire came out from the Presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord". Lev. 10:1-2

Many explanations were given by the Sages and later commentators as to what Nadav and Avihu's sin actually was. But the simplest answer, given by the Torah itself here and elsewhere (Num. 3:4, Num. 26:61), is that they acted on their own initiative. They did what they had not been commanded. They acted spontaneously, perhaps out of sheer enthusiasm in the mood of the moment, offering "unauthorised fire". Evidently it is dangerous to act spontaneously in matters of the spirit.

But is it? Moses acted spontaneously in far more fraught circumstances when he shattered the Tablets of Stone upon seeing the Israelites cavorting around the Golden Calf. The tablets – hewn and engraved by God Himself – were perhaps the holiest objects there have ever been. Yet Moses was not punished for his act. The Sages said that though he acted of his own accord without first consulting God, God assented to this act. Rashi refers to this moment in his very last comment on the Torah, whose last verse (Deut. 34:12) speaks about "all the strong hand, and all the great awe, which Moses performed before the eyes of all Israel":

שנשאו לבו לשבור הלווחות : לעני כ"ל ישראל
ואהשברם לעיניכם (ז, ל, ע"ל) שנאמר, לעיניהם
א, שמות לד(שנאמר, ה, לדעתו) והסכימה דעת הקב"ה
ישר כחך שברטה אשר שברת

This refers to when Moses] took the liberty

By Dr. Larry Bryskin & family
in memory of his grandmother,
Henya Steinberg, a"h, (Henya bas Dov)
27 Nissan

Shabbat Parashat Shemini

5785 B"H

of shattering the tablets before their eyes, as it is said, "I shattered them before your eyes." The Holy One, Blessed be He, consented to his opinion, as it is said, "which you shattered – " 'More power to you for shattering them!'

Why then was spontaneity wrong for Nadav and Avihu yet right for Moshe Rabbeinu? The answer is that Nadav and Avihu were Kohanim, Priests. Moses was a Navi, a Prophet. These are two different forms of religious leadership. They involve different tasks, different sensibilities, indeed different approaches to time itself.

The Kohen serves God in a way that never changes over time (except, of course, when the Temple was destroyed and its service, presided over by the Kohanim, came to an end). The Prophet serves God in a way that is constantly changing over time. When people are at ease the Prophet warns of forthcoming catastrophe. When they suffer catastrophe and are in the depths of despair, the Prophet brings consolation and hope.

The words said by the Kohen are always the same. The priestly blessing uses the same words today as it did in the days of Moses and Aaron. But the words used by a Prophet are never the same. As it is noted: "No two Prophets use the same style." Sanhedrin 89a

So for a Prophet spontaneity is of the essence. But for the Kohen engaged in Divine service it is completely out of place.

Why the difference? After all, the Priest and the Prophet were serving the same God. The Torah uses a kind of device we have only recently re-invented in a somewhat different form. Stereophonic sound – sound coming from two different speakers – was developed in the 1930s to give the impression of audible perspective. In the 1950s 3D film was developed to do for sight what stereo had done for sound. From the work of Pierre Broca in the 1860s to today, using MRI and PET scans, neuroscientists have striven to understand how our bicameral brain allows us to respond more intelligently to our environment than would otherwise have been possible. Twin perspectives are needed fully to experience reality.

The twin perspectives of the Priest and Prophet correspond to the twin perspectives on creation represented, respectively, by Genesis 1:1-2:3 (spoken in the priestly voice, with an emphasis

on order, structure, divisions and boundaries), and Genesis 2:4-3:24 (spoken in the prophetic voice, with an emphasis on the nuances and dynamics of interpersonal relationships).

Now let us consider one other area in which there was an ongoing argument between structure and spontaneity, namely tefillah, prayer, specifically the Amidah. We know that after the destruction of the Temple, Rabban Gamliel and his court at Yavneh established a standard text for the weekday Amidah, comprising eighteen or later nineteen blessings in a precise order (Mishnah Brachot 4:3).

Not everyone, however, agreed. Rabbi Joshua held that individuals could say an abridged form of the Amidah. According to some interpretations, Rabbi Eliezer was opposed to a fixed text altogether and held that one should, each day, say something new (Talmud Yerushalmi Brachot 4).

It seems that this disagreement is precisely parallel to another one about the source of the daily prayers: It has been stated: R. Jose, son of R. Hanina said: The prayers were instituted by the Patriarchs. R. Joshua b. Levi says: The prayers were instituted to replace the daily sacrifices. Brachot 26b

According to R. Jose, son of R. Hanina, Shacharit was established by Abraham, Minchah by Isaac, and Maariv by Jacob. According to R. Joshua b. Levi, Shacharit corresponds to the daily morning sacrifice, and Minchah to the afternoon sacrifice. On the face of it, the disagreement has no practical consequences, but in fact it does.

If the prayers were instituted by the patriarchs, then their origin is prophetic. If they were established to replace the sacrifices, then their provenance is priestly. Priests were forbidden to act spontaneously, but Prophets did so as a matter of course. Someone who saw prayer as priestly would, like Rabban Gamliel, emphasise the importance of a precise text. One who saw it as prophetic would, like Rabbi Eliezer as understood by the Talmud Yerushalmi, value spontaneity and each day try to say something new.

Tradition eventually resolved the matter in a most remarkable way. We say each Amidah

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twice, once privately and silently in the tradition of the Prophets, then a second time publicly and collectively by the shaliach tzibbur, the “reader’s repetition”, in the tradition of a Priest offering a sacrifice at the Temple. (It is easy to understand why there is no reader’s repetition in the Maariv service: there was no sacrifice at night-time). During the silent Amidah we are permitted to add extra words of our own. During the repetition we are not. That is because Prophets acted spontaneously, but Priests did not.

The tragedy of Nadav and Avihu is that they made the mistake of acting like Prophets when they were, in fact, Priests. But we have inherited both traditions, and wisely so, for without structure, Judaism would have no continuity, but without spontaneity it would have no fresh life. The challenge is to maintain the balance without ever confusing the place of each.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Brides and Grooms, Feasts and Fasts

“And it happened on the eighth day...of the consecration of the Sanctuary, which was the first day of the month of Nisan...” (Rashi, Leviticus 9:1)

The first day of the month of Nisan is a great occasion of joy within biblical history. It is the day when the Almighty declared His first commandment to Israel: “This renewal of the moon shall be to you the festival of the new moon; it is to be to you the first month of the months of the year” (Exodus 12:2).

Indeed, the Midrash records that these divine words were heard throughout Egypt, because they foretold that a most significant event was about to take place on this first of the yearly months, the Israelite nation was about to be born as it leaves Egypt amidst great wonders and miracles, a stupendous change was about to transform the political and social character of the greatest power in the world, the Egyptian slave society (hodesh, hidush, month, change, novelty).

Therefore, the whole of the month of Nisan is considered to be a holiday, thus, “We are not to fall on our faces (by reciting the penitential prayer tachanun) for the entire month of Nisan... and we are not even to fast (during this month) for a yahrzeit (death anniversary of a departed parent). (Shulkhan Arukh, Orakh Chayim 429, with Rema)

The apparent reason for this festive quality of the month is the fact that Nisan is the month of our redemption. And this is especially true for Rosh Chodesh Nisan, the first day of the month of Nisan, when God’s word was heard throughout Egypt and the optimistic command of sanctifying the monthly renewal of the

moon was given to Israel. Indeed, this is probably the reason why the author of the Passover Haggadah even suggests that the Seder ought to have taken place on Rosh Chodesh Nisan, were it not for the requirement of matza and maror on the evening of the 15th of Nisan.

And yet, the same Rabbi Moshe Isserles who forbids fasting on a yahrzeit during the month of Nisan and who generally forbids a bride and groom from fasting on their wedding day if they are married on any Rosh Chodesh (first of the month) throughout the year – since a bride and groom are forgiven all of their prior sins on their wedding day, they are by custom enjoined to make the day before their wedding a mini Yom Kippur fast up until the marriage ceremony – does specifically enjoin the bride and groom to fast on Rosh Chodesh Nisan! (Shulkhan Arukh, Orakh Chayim 572, Rema).

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, the Chafetz Chaim, agrees, although other authorities consider it “a great wonder.” How can we explain the tradition allowing a bride and groom to fast on Rosh Chodesh Nisan?

The reason given by the Rema for the wedding fast is precisely because of the horrific tragedy of which we read in the opening verses of the biblical reading: The deaths of Nadav and Avihu, which occurred specifically on the first day of the month of Nisan, the eighth day of the consecration of the Sanctuary, the very day on which the Sanctuary was erected.

Why was a day of such religious sensitivity and significance transformed into such tragedy and terror? And why express the agony of what was supposed to have been a day of ecstasy into the fast of a bride and groom on that day?

According to Rashi, Nadav and Avihu were righteous individuals, even more righteous than Moses and Aaron.

Why does the sanctification of the House of God require such sacrifices – the sincerely pious sons of Aaron, the High Priest? The sacred text doesn’t explain itself, it merely ordains and decrees. The Divine Presence is a flame of fire – and fire purifies, purges, but it also consumes.

But why do we recognize the tragedy of the day – a day on which we still recite the usual Psalms of Praise (Hallel) of Rosh Chodesh – specifically by allowing the bride and groom to fast prior to their wedding ceremony if they are being married on that day?

The answer to this question is to be found in the Midrash, which suggests that the commandment to build the Sanctuary was given only after the Almighty had forgiven

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Israel for the sin of the golden calf, on the morrow of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. From this perspective, the Sanctuary became the nuptial home in which God and Israel were to dwell together forever, the supreme symbol that Israel had indeed been forgiven; from this moment onward, the major metaphor for the God-Israel relationship became that of bride and groom.

Hence, every bride and groom are a reflection of God the groom and Israel the bride, with the bond of matrimony reflecting a little bit of divine love and forgiveness. And just as every marriage has moments of tragedy as well as joy, of fasting as well as feasting, even God’s subsequent relationship with Israel contained the zenith of our holy Temples and the nadir of our exiles. Ultimately, however, we know that God will redeem us, so that a Jewish marriage is an expression of faith in a glorious Jewish future despite our rootedness in blood, and of Jewish belief “that there will be heard in the streets of Judea and the great places of Jerusalem the sound of joy and happiness, the sound of bride and groom” despite our exile and persecution.

The death of Nadav and Avihu on the very day of the completion and final consecration of the Sanctuary was an expression of our realization that our marriage with God will be rocky as well as rapturous, will have moments of loving communication as well as moments of inexplicable isolation and abandonment. The young bride and groom similarly reflect the heartthrobs and heartaches of married life by their fast on Rosh Chodesh, as well as their faith in each other that they will overcome every challenge and emerge from their trials strengthened and redeemed. And so Aaron is silent, “Vayidom Aharon,” (Leviticus 10:3) when faced with the tragedy of his sons’ demise. He realizes that there are divine decrees which must be accepted even when they cannot be understood.

In a Munich Synagogue several years ago, I witnessed another kind of silence. There were about one hundred people in shul – but only the cantor and I were praying. Everyone else was talking – not in the hushed tones in which neighbors generally speak during the prayer service but in loud conversations, even occasionally walking from place to place as they spoke, seemingly totally unaware of the praying and Torah reading going on at “center stage.” My host explained it very well: “These Jews are all Holocaust survivors or children of Holocaust survivors. They’re angry at God – so they can’t, or won’t speak to Him. But neither can they live without Him. So they come to shul, and they don’t speak to Him. But they do speak to each other...”

I believe that bride and groom must also learn from the congregation in Munich. There are

often difficult moments in life, so difficult that you can't even speak to God, you can only be silent before the divine decree. But at these moments you must speak to each other, give to and garner strength from each other, attempt to find comfort in the miracle of your love for each other.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Moshe's Premonition That "Something Like This" Was Going to Happen

Parshas Shemini contains the tragic event of the sudden death of Aharon's two eldest sons, Nadav and Avihu. Chazal note on the opening words of the parsha ("Vayehi b'yom hashemini") that the term "Vayehi" connotes pain. In this context, tragedy struck on the eighth day (which coincided with Rosh Chodesh Nissan), following the shivas yimay hamiluim (seven days of inauguration) of the Mishkan, during which Moshe served as the Kohen.

Just as Aharon was taking over the job as Kohen Gadol and his sons were taking over the jobs of serving as the Kohanim in the Mishkan, Nadav and Avihu brought an "eish zarah" (foreign fire) and were struck down right then and there. Whenever I read this parsha I think to myself, imagine if there was a Chanukas Habayis of a Bais Haknesses (dedication ceremony for a new shul). Everyone is dancing. It is a beautiful moment in time, and then suddenly a beam from the roof collapses and hits someone on the head and kills him on the spot. It would be an untold tragedy. People would never look at that shul the same. How much more so in this case. Aharon's two eldest sons die, righteous leaders of Israel, right there in the Mishkan! It must have had a horrible effect.

The pasuk says: "Moshe said to Aharon: Of this did Hashem speak, saying: 'I will be sanctified through those who are nearest Me, thus I will be honored before the entire people; and Aharon was silent.' (Vayikra 10:3). Rashi writes: "Aharon my brother, I knew that this House would be sanctified through those who were closest to the Omnipresent. I figured it would be through either me or you. Now I see that they (Nadav and Avihu) were greater than me or you."

This is a very powerful, yet enigmatic statement by Rashi. "I knew that this had to happen." What does that mean? Can it mean that a tragedy needed to happen? Why would a tragedy need to happen upon the inauguration of the Mishkan? We never consider such a possibility when we plan a Chanukas Habayis!

The Dubno Maggid in his Ohel Yakov gives a beautiful parable explaining what it means when Moshe said "I knew that this was going to happen." As is his style, the Dubno Maggid

asks "Mashal l'mah ha'davar domeh" (To what can this matter be compared)? Imagine that a country wanted to build a capital city to be the most beautiful city in the world. They hired the greatest architects and the most professional builders in the world. (When Washington D.C. was being designed, the fledgling American Government brought in Pierre Charles L'Enfant, a French army engineer who fought in the Revolutionary War, to build the most beautiful capital city imaginable. Washington D.C. is indeed a beautiful place.) So, they build in the finest of everything, the finest materials, the finest architects, etc., etc., etc.

Of course, being a world-class city, as they envision, they want to also build there for themselves a world class hospital, the greatest hospital the world has ever seen. Again, it would have the latest technology, the best staff, the best equipment, all the 'hidurim'. And of course, it would need to have the greatest doctor in the world. Since this is the capital city, the city that is going to put all other cities in the world to shame, and since this is going to be the hospital that is the most world-renowned medical center, it needs to have at its head the greatest doctor to walk the face of the earth.

And so it was. On the day they cut the ribbon to go into the city, everything opened as planned. People were overwhelmed by the beauty. One fellow started not feeling well on this first day of the inauguration of the city. He complained of a headache. He went into the hospital and became the first patient in the hospital. Of course, the head of the hospital, this world-renowned doctor treated him personally. (It is just a headache. "Take two aspirin and call me in the morning.") A few days later, the person died. He died in the best hospital in the world, in the greatest city in the world, under the care of the best doctor in the world, from a headache yet! What happened? How did this go wrong?

The Board of the Hospital gets together to analyze what happened. It is so embarrassing. The mayor comes to join in the investigation. The head doctor gets up and says "The fact that this person died is the most fortunate thing that could have happened to this city." He explained: If we have the greatest city in the world, the most pleasant city to live in, and we have the best hospital in the world, everyone will say "I don't need to take care of myself. I can eat without caring about my weight gain. I don't need to watch my cholesterol. I don't need to monitor my blood pressure. I don't need to exercise. I have no worries about my health because I live in the city with the best hospital in the world. If I get sick, I will go to the hospital and be treated by the best doctor in the world and everything will be fine."

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The doctor said that this is why it was important, and even helpful, that the first patient in the hospital died. This lets people know that such calculations are incorrect. Someone can have the most beautiful city, the greatest technology, the greatest hospital with the greatest equipment and the greatest doctor, but you still need to take care of yourself.

The Dubno Maggid explained the 'nimshah' (object of his comparison): Klal Yisrael now had a Mishkan. A Mishkan is a place where Korbonos are brought. The people might figure that now we can do whatever we want. All we need to do now is go to the Mishkan, bring a Korban, recite the Vidui (confession), v'Nomer Amen! (L'Havdil, this is a phenomenon found in the Catholic Church. Catholics feel that they can do anything that they want, go to the priest and say "Forgive me father, for I have sinned" and their sins are atoned for, without even needing to fast on Yom Kippur!)

People might think: We have a Mishkan. We can now do anything that is forbidden and be guaranteed forgiveness. So Moshe Rabbeinu told Aharon that it was important to disabuse the masses of such a notion. More importantly, Heaven needed to teach a lesson that it is crucial to be careful with the Mishkan and its holiness. If not treated with the proper deference, the Mishkan itself can kill. This thing that people think is the cure-all and panacea for all ills may actually cause fatalities, if people don't act properly.

That is what Moshe Rabbeinu meant when he said "I knew that this House would be sanctified through those who were close to the Omnipresent." The Mishkan is akin to radiation. It is very powerful. It has much positive potential, but someone who is not careful with it may be killed by it.

The Power of Silence

The second thought I would like to share is from the end of that very pasuk: "Vayidom Aharon" (...And Aharon was silent). (Vayikra 10:3). This is an incredible thing. Aharon haKohen lost his two eldest sons who were tzadikim, and yet his reaction was silence. The Ba'al HaTurim writes that the word "Vayidom" appears only twice in Tanach. It appears once here in Parshas Shemini, and once more in Sefer Yehoshua (10:13) "And the sun was silent (vayidom hashemesh) and the moon stood still..." Klal Yisroel was in battle with the Emorites and wanted to pursue them, however it was getting dark. Yeshosua miraculously made the sun stand still. The sun did not set that day and the Jews were able to pursue their enemy.

Ostensibly, the two vayidoms have different meanings. One means that Aharon was silent and the other means that the sun did not move.

On the face of it, the identical words do not mean the same thing in these two places. Vayidom hashemesh means the sun kept on shining. How is that analogous to Vayidom Aharon, which means Aharon kept quiet? What is the connection between these two different uses of the word vayidom?

The Ba'al HaTurim addresses the connection, but I saw the following explanation in the sefer Kol Aryeh (by a Rav Yehudah Aryeh Klein, who was a Rav in Pressburg). There is a Gemara (Chullin 60b—which Rashi brings in Parshas Bereshis 1:16) that when the Ribono shel Olam created the sun and the moon, they were of equal size. The Medrashic story is well known: The moon complained that co-equal kings are not practical. One needs to be larger and one needs to be smaller. Hashem thereupon commanded the moon to make itself smaller. The sun remained its original size, and it is thereafter referred to as the “Maor hagadol” (the large illuminator) in the sky.

The Kol Aryeh says that it is a bit strange to call the sun Hamaor hagadol just because it was now bigger than the moon, because the sun did not get larger. It only remained the larger of the two luminaries by default. The Kol Aryeh suggests a different reason why the sun is known as the Maor hagadol: When the moon said to the Ribono shel Olam that it is not right to have two kings of the same size, the sun should have immediately popped up and said “Wait a minute! You are telling me that I should be smaller? Maybe you should be smaller!” At the very least, the sun could have demanded that they both go to a Din Torah over the issue.

Instead, the sun was silent. Vayidom hashemesh. The sun didn’t say anything. The Kol Aryeh says that is why the sun is called Hamaor hagadol. When someone is hurt, as the sun was (which is the natural reaction to the moon implying ‘you shouldn’t be that size; you are too big!’), and does not respond, that is very praiseworthy. Therefore, both vayidoms do indeed refer to silence.

The Kol Aryeh points out that this explanation enables us to understand the following Gemara very well (Shabbos 88b): “The Rabbis taught – those who suffer insult but do not insult in response, who hear their disgrace but do not reply, who perform G-d’s will out of Love and are happy even in suffering, regarding them the pasuk states, ‘But they who love Him shall be as the sun going forth in its might’ (Shoftim 5:31)” We say that the person who silently hears his insults is loved by the Almighty “like the sun in its might”.

Where do we see that? The Kol Aryeh says this is where we see it. The sun should have stood up for itself when the moon proposed that one of them be diminished in size.

Vayidom hashemesh. The sun was silent. The ability to keep quiet and walk away when insulted by another is the strength the sun demonstrated during those first days of creation.

The Kol Aryeh says that this is what the Baal HaTurim means when he says that there are two vayidoms in the Torah. Vayidom Aharon and Vayidom hashemesh. Where did Aharon learn this capacity to stay silent after the Ribono shel Olam took away his two children? He learned it from the shemesh.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

What is a ‘scribe’ in Hebrew? It’s ‘sofer’, but isn’t that astonishing?

Sofer literally means somebody who counts, so the scribe who writes a Torah scroll, is a person who counts numbers.

What’s the connection?

The Talmud explains that it was so important for scribes to know how many words and how many letters there are in a Torah scroll, so that they are able to determine, that they had not left anything out.

This is quite astonishing. In pre-computer times, the scribes knew how many words and how many letters there were in the entire Torah.

As a result, they were able to say, the Torah has an even number of words and the two middle words, are found in this week’s portion of Shemini, Vayikra chapter 10, verse 16.

They are ‘darosh darash’, which means ‘Moshe enquired’, he asked, he demanded to know what was happening.

From there we have the word ‘derasha’ – a discourse.

I think that this is so powerful. What a message! What a teaching! Right at the heart of the Torah, the essence of it all is that we need to have an inquiring mind.

We need to be asking questions, we need to be demanding answers with regard to that which troubles us in life.

The Gemara Masechet Shabbat daf lamud tells us, that Hillel the elder, was famous for being a very sweet natured, calm and patient person, nobody ever saw Hillel in a rage.

So, two friends made a bet and one said to the other, I bet you that I will make Hillel angry.

So how did he do this? He posed ridiculous questions to Hillel, such as, ‘Why do the

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Talmudians have oddly shaped eyes? ‘Why do the Babylonians have oval shaped heads?’

Hillel’s answer to every question was ‘she’elah gedolah sha’alta’ – you have asked a great question, and he went on to give an answer, nothing was going to upset Hillel.

The man lost his bet, and the Talmud tells us as a result of this anecdote, that this is the reason we follow the Halachic decisions of Hillel, and not of Shamai, because, he was a person who loved questions, he appreciated an opportunity to explain, regardless of how great or poor the questions were.

From the middle of the Torah, let us never forget not to be shy about asking and indeed, that’s a message of Pirkei Avot, which tells us ‘lo habbayshan lamed’ – a shy student will never do well.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

“And he said: ‘Hineni, here I am.’”

Shimrit Budkov

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...” A new world is built from nothing. A world composed of endless details – heavens and waters, light and darkness, animals of the land and winged creatures, and man to rule over them.

Heavens – as it is written: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...”

Waters – as it is said: “Let the waters be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.”

Light and darkness – as is written: “Let there be light.”

Animals – as is stated: “And God created... every winged bird according to its kind.”

Man – as the Torah says: “Let us make man.”

After the creation of man, the Lord plants “a garden in Eden, in the east” and places Adam, the First Man within it. Adam, who desires the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge and eats from it, violating God’s command, is punished. Death is decreed upon him, and he is expelled from the Garden of Eden. To ensure that he does not return to the Garden of Eden, God places guardians at its entrance: the cherubim with the flaming, revolving sword.

Approximately 2500 years later, God commands Moshe to erect the Tabernacle. This singular and complex creation is composed of a myriad of materials – goats’ hair curtains and coverings, a basin and Menorah, the Ark of the Covenant. And

Aharon the Kohen is chosen to serve therein and perform the Sacred Service.

In Midrash Tanhuma on Pekudei, it is stated that the creation of the world corresponds to the creation of the Tabernacle, which is, in fact, a microcosm of sorts. It is written:

"Rabi Yaakov the son of Rabi Assi asked: Why does it say 'I love the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thy glory dwelleth'? (Psalms 26:8) Because the Tabernacle is equated with the creation of the world itself."

How is this so?

On the first day of Creation, it is written: 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth' (Genesis 1:1), and it is also written (Psalms 104:2): 'Who stretched out the heavens like a curtain'. Similarly, in the Tabernacle it is written: 'And thou shalt make curtains of goats' hair' (Exodus 26:7).

Of the second day of Creation, it states: 'Let there be a firmament and divide between them, and let it divide the waters from the waters' (Genesis 1:6). Of the Tabernacle it is written: 'And the veil shall divide between you' (Exodus 26:33).

On the third day of creation, we read: 'Let the waters under the heavens be gathered' (Genesis 1:9). With reference to the Tabernacle, it is written: 'Thou shalt also make a laver of brass ... and thou shalt put water therein' (Exodus 30:18).

On the fourth day, God created light, as is stated: 'Let there be lights in the firmament of heaven' (Genesis 1:14), and of the Tabernacle it is said: 'And thou shalt make a Menorah of pure gold' (Exodus 25:31).

On the fifth day God created birds, as is written: 'Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let the fowl fly above the earth' (Genesis 1:20), and with reference to the Tabernacle, God directed them to offer sacrifices of lambs and fowl. Moreover, and it says: 'And the cherubim shall spread out their wings on high' (Exodus 25:20).

On the sixth day, God created man, as it is said: 'And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him' (Genesis 1:27), and of the Tabernacle it is written: 'A man', referring to the high priest who was anointed to serve and to minister before God."

Finally, when the great construction of the Tabernacle was completed, the Torah writes: "Thus was finished all the work of the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting; and the children of Israel did according to all that the Lord commanded Moshe, so did they...And

Moshe saw all the work, and, behold, they had done it; as the Lord had commanded, even so had they done it. And Moshe blessed them." (Exodus 39:32, 43)

The Torah uses the words יָתְכַל ("it was finished"), יָשַׁע ("they had done it") and מְלָאָה ("work") when describing the culmination of the Tabernacle. Seemingly ordinary words. However, given the order in which they are written, and the usage of these particular roots in the same verses, echoes a previous event:

"And the heaven and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. And God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it; because that in it He rested from all His work which God in creating had made." (Genesis 2:1-3)

Following the Divine commands, the gathering of the materials, the planning, and the construction, Moshe finally erects the Tabernacle, and for seven days, offerings are brought forth. Yet, to his great dismay, the Divine Presence does not descend upon the Mishkan. Then, on the eighth day, Moshe declares: "For today the Lord will appear to you" – today the Almighty will manifest His presence in the Mishkan. Still and all, the Divine Presence makes no appearance.

Suddenly, Nadav and Avihu take firepans with incense and fire and enter the Holy of Holies, with the intention of actively bringing down the Divine Presence. But what is the nature of this entry of theirs? And why specifically do Nadav and Avihu seek to enter "into the innermost" realm, the Holy of Holies, not even clothed in the garments of the High Priest?

As we have seen above, the Tabernacle is a miniature model of the world, and, thus, the Holy of Holies is a miniature model of the Garden of Eden. Much like the Cherubim, who stand guard upon the Ark in the Holy of Holies, Cherubim also guarded the entrance of the Garden of Eden. When the Kohen Gadol enters the Holy of Holies [on Yom Kippur], it is said of him that if he is found worthy, he enters there in peace and exits in peace. However, should he not be found worthy, from between the two Cherubim comes forth a flame, and he is consumed and dies in their presence." (Zohar Hadash on Bereshit)

After the death of Nadav and Avihu, Moshe commands Mishael and Elzaphan to remove Nadav and Avihu's bodies from the Holy of Holies. Our Sages tell us that Mishael and Elzaphan were the ones who approached Moshe after being unable to participate in the Pesach offering (as they were ritually impure after carrying the bodies out of the Holy of

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Holies), with the following claim: "We are impure by the dead body of a man [‘nefesh adam’]; wherefore are we to be kept back, so as not to bring the offering of the Lord in its appointed season among the children of Israel?" The AR"l explains that the expression "nefesh adam" [literally meaning "the soul of Adam"] refers to Adam, the First Man: "In particular, in what we explained in the verse 'We are impure by a nefesh adam, 'for Nadav and Avihu themselves are the soul of the First Man, and, as such, wanted to rectify his sin.'" (Sha'ar HaPesukim).

From here, we understand that Nadav and Avihu (who were reincarnations of Adam) essentially enter the Holy of Holies (which is the counterpart of the Garden of Eden) without the priestly garments (just as Adam was without clothing in the Garden of Eden before the sin), attempting to rectify the sin of Adam himself. However, they fail in doing so, and just like Adam in his time, death is decreed upon them.

The punishment is severe and seems unbearable. Adam, is expelled from the Garden of Eden and is devastated by sorrow. The Midrash tells us that when Adam left the Garden of Eden, darkness fell on the earth as the day was drawing to a close, and Adam said, "Woe to me, for I caused the world to be dark." But when the sun rose the next day, he was relieved and said, "It seems that this is the way of the world."

And now what? What reason was there to go on?

"And Adam knew Eve his wife" – Adam says to himself: "Even if death is decreed, it does not mean the world must end. Rectification will come – if not through me, then through my descendants."

And now to our portion of Tzav. Aharon's punishment is likewise severe, and his world seems to have shattered. Aharon the High Priest is speechless. On the great day when the Almighty was supposed to manifest His presence in the Tabernacle, the day when God was to demonstrate forgiveness to the people of Israel and to Aharon for the Sin of the Golden Calf – that day ends in mourning, when his two eldest sons die.

Now what? What reason was there to go on?

"And Aharon was silent" – Aharon may have stopped talking, but does not for a moment cease to act. Not for himself, but for the public. He engages in communal and spiritual work for the good of the People of Israel. From that moment onwards, Aharon the High Priest would not leave the Tabernacle, which was designed to atone for the people of Israel;

rather, he would be there always with the good of the entire community in mind. Aharon says to himself: "Even if death is decreed, it does not mean the world must end. Rectification will come – if not through my children, then through the entire nation of Israel."

In his book *Orot HaKodesh*, Rabbi Kook explains that in order for a person to successfully transcend his personal fate, he must engage in broader circles of activity. By doing so, the transition from focusing on oneself to focusing on the public creates equilibrium in the personal sphere as well, without undermining the individual's personal needs. When an individual immerses himself in a broader, more compassionate, and empathetic setting, he thereby expands his own being, thus becoming a vessel into which blessings and joy can flow.

In his book *Lessons in Leadership*, Rabbi Sacks explains the importance of constructive action during times of crisis: "What matters is the willingness, when challenge calls, to say, *Hineni*, 'Here I am.'

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Daniel Stein

Beware of Religious Exhibitionism

In the first few pesukim of *Parshas Tzav*, the Torah thrice discusses the fire on the mizbeach, using similar language each time, indicating that there were multiple piles of wood burning simultaneously (see *Rashi*). However, only in the final instance is the subject of the phrase and the location of the fire stated explicitly, when the pasuk tells us, "A continuous fire shall burn upon the alter" (*Vayikra* 6:6). On the other occasions the pasuk is a bit vague when it states, "and the fire of the alter shall burn in it" (*Vayikra* 6:2, 6:6). Presumably the pronoun "it" is referring to the mizbeach itself, but the absence of a specific antecedent, particularly in the latter instance which comes at the beginning of a pasuk, is awkward and creates the potential for an alternative interpretation.

Continuing with the theme of the intervening pesukim which instruct the Kohen about the proper procedure for removing the previous day's ashes from the mizbeach, the *Kli Yakar* and the *Chasam Sofer* suggest that the fire mentioned here is not only describing the literal fire of the mizbeach but also alluding to the passion for spirituality that should burn "within him," that is, inside of every Kohen and indeed every Jew. The *Imrei Emes* (*Likkutei Yehudah*, *Parshas Tzav*) echoes this idea but stresses that one's personal excitement and enthusiasm for mitzvos should not be discernable externally but rather remain hidden, burning "within him." He adds in the name of the *Kotzker Rebbe*, that most of the letters in the *Sefer Torah* are written in a

uniform font size, but the letter "mem" from the word "mokdah al hamizbeach" - "burns on the alter" (*Vayikra* 6:2) is written smaller than usual, perhaps to indicate that the fire and fervor for Divine connection should be inconspicuous and understated.

The *Beis Yisroel* marshals support for this notion from the *Gemara* (*Sukkah* 28a), which defines the greatness of *Hillel the Elder* by virtue of the qualities and piety of his students. According to the *Gemara*, the most exceptional student of *Hillel the Elder* was *Yonasan ben Uzziel* and the least impressive was *Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai*. Regarding *Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai*, the *Gemara* attests that he successfully explored and mastered every area and discipline of *Torah*, ranging from the "great matters" to the "small matters." About *Yonasan ben Uzziel*, the *Gemara* relates "that when he sat and was engaged in *Torah* study the sanctity that he generated was so intense that any bird that flew overhead was immediately incinerated."

Why does the *Gemara* insist on painting a vicarious portrait of *Hillel the Elder* by detailing the accomplishments of his students. Undoubtedly, the exploits of *Hillel the Elder's* talmidim are a critical piece of his contribution and legacy, but didn't he have his own unique achievements and abilities? The *Sfas Emes* explains that the *Gemara* was forced to provide a second-hand account of *Hillel the Elder's* holiness and impact because his own activities were a mystery even to his closest disciples. *Hillel the Elder* kept his spiritual pursuits private such that the measure of his knowledge was unknown to others and the intensity of his religious enthusiasm was not apparent. Only by reflecting upon the nature of his students is it possible to get even a glimpse of his persona. But perhaps the tacit testament and true depiction of *Hillel the Elder's* towering stature was his concealed spiritual identity.

Similarly, the pasuk states in *Parshas Behaaloscha* with regards to the lighting of the menorah, "And Ahron did so, he lit the lamps toward the face of the menorah, as Hashem had commanded Moshe" (*Bamidbar* 8:3), to which *Rashi* comments, "in order to tell the praise of Ahron that he did not deviate." Many *meforshim* are bothered by the need to recognize and compliment Ahron for his faithful conduct. Why is his dependable trustworthiness somehow surprising? The *Bnei Yissaschar* (*Igra De'kalla*, *Parshas Behaaloscha*) answers that the *Torah* was noting that while Ahron was presumably ecstatic and brimming with eagerness in anticipation of lighting the menorah, he remained composed and controlled. Other *tzaddikim*, might have gotten caught up in the heightened emotions of the moment and spilled the oil or toppled the menorah in their anxious effort to do everything correctly. But

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not Ahron. Ahron was undoubtedly emotionally engaged in the mitzvah but his feelings were internalized and his comportment disciplined and unflappable.

Nadav and Avihu's precise sin is hard to pinpoint, the *Torah* only gives us a cryptic clue when it states, "and they brought before Hashem a foreign fire which He had not commanded them" (*Vayikra* 10:1). The ambiguous written record gives *Chazal* wide latitude to speculate. According to the *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 52a), Nadav and Avihu were punished because they were once walking behind *Moshe* and *Ahron* while irreverently murmuring to each other, "When will these two old men die so that you and I can lead the generation." *Rashi* cites a different opinion from the *Medrash*, that Nadav and Avihu died because they entered the *Sanctuary* while intoxicated, which explains why this episode is followed by the prohibition, "Drink no wine or other intoxicant, you or your sons, when you enter the *Ohel Moed*, that you may not die" (*Vayikra* 10:9).

The *Shem Mishmuel* (*Parshas Korach*) weaves these two versions of the story together and submits that Nadav and Avihu were frustrated by *Moshe* and *Ahron's* lack of visible enthusiasm when performing mitzvos. They perceived *Moshe* and *Ahron's* dry and stoic nature as robotic and outdated. In their estimation, the passionate pursuit of *dveikus* needed to be exhibited and displayed externally in order to be dynamic, vibrant, and compelling. For this reason, they entered the *Mikdash* while intoxicated, because "When wine enters secrets emerge" (*Sanhedrin* 38a), and their aspiration was to spawn a movement of liberated excitement for mitzvos which had heretofore been systematically restricted and subdued. However, their public parade of emotion and passion is labeled by the *Torah* as a "foreign fire" because authentic spirituality is inherently reticent and contemplative and not able to be expressed in physical or worldly terms. Therefore, any unprescribed demonstration is, by definition, shallow and superficial, and incompatible with a genuine quest for *ruchniyus*.

To be sure, holy individuals sometimes move rhythmically with the mitzvos, as the *Gemara* (*Berachos* 31a) relates, that when *Rabbi Akiva* prayed, he would unwittingly drift from one corner of the room to the other. However, the *Noam Elimelech* (*Parshas Kedoshim*) cautions onlookers, that any deliberate attempt to mimic or adopt these practices artificially is misplaced and ill-advised. Emphasizing the importance of a random gesticulations, even when accompanying the performance of a mitzvah and intending to express a sincere pursuit of closeness, is a distortion, for it changes the focus from spirituality to externality and transforms an otherwise holy

fire into one that is strange and forced. Even an earnest attempt to create a more animated spiritual experience for the admirable and altruistic purpose of increasing and inspiring interest and engagement, can easily slide into religious exhibitionism and virtue signaling, particularly in a society which promotes and celebrates performative behavior.

But alas this method is demanding and hard. For this reason, the Torah introduces the mitzvah to offer the korban olah with the word "tzav" - "command" (Vayikra 6:2), which implies an extra dose of urging and encouragement (Rashi). Why does the mitzvah to bring the korban olah receive more attention and advocacy than any other mitzvah? The Chiddushei Harim explains that perhaps it is because every other mitzvah requires some form of action or speech. All other korbanos were either eaten by the owner, the kohen, or both. Only the korban olah was burned completely on the mizbeach, and therefore aside from initiating the actual sacrificial procedure, nothing was done by the owner of the korban. Without any external activity to focus on, the mitzvah becomes a spontaneous internal exercise, which can be significantly more difficult than operating from the platform of a prescribed deed and course of action. In recognition of this reality, the Torah lends an extra word of support to the korban olah.

We also need chizzuk in this regard. Rav Naftali of Ropshitz (Zera Kodesh, Shoftim) writes, that in order to distract us from real spiritual work the yetzer hara often presents us with an easier albeit less ambitious option. In response to this strategy, the Torah warns us "you shall not take bribes" (Devarim 16:19), because in this scenario the smaller goal functions as a bribe to satisfy our spiritual cravings and abandon our true objective. Let us not be enticed and appeased by the low hanging fruit of religious exhibitions, accessories, and gesticulations, but rather engage in the labor of building an elaborate internal spiritual world where a personal and private relationship with Hashem can develop and thrive.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

Golden Apples

The sons of Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, each took his fire-pan, they put fire in the them and placed them. A fire came forth from before HASHEM an alien fire that He had not commanded them. A fire came forth from before HASHEM and consumed them, and they died before HASHEM. (Vayikra 10:1-2)

Rabbi Akiva opines that the phrase "lifnei Hashem" – "before HASHEM" means they died within the Kodesh Hakedoshim. – Toras Kohanim

This is scary. One of the greatest days in human history was marred and scarred by this sudden tragedy. Many great scholars have played the role of forensic detectives to figure out what went so terribly wrong. Why exactly were they worthy of dying? If it is not explicitly spelled out then it must be by design purposely obscured. What are we underlings to conclude? Perhaps one thing is certain. Watch out! Be cautious in the realm of the HOLY. The holier an environment is, the higher the spiritual voltage.

The Mishnah states that the Kohain Gadol would sponsor a feast upon emerging safely (Yoma 7:4 [70a]). According to the Meiri, it would appear that the celebration was due to the Kohain Gadol's safe emergence from the Holy of Holies. It seems this was a very risky venture to enter such a profoundly spiritual environment. It's like an MRI machine. Hidden faults are exposed.

When America put a man on the moon, and I remember the day, it was cause for national celebration. Why the celebration? Did we all go to the moon? Of course not! When one man stood there, it was as if a part of each and every one of us had reached that rarified territory. There was a sense of collective pride and accomplishment.

So too when the Kohain Gadol on Yom Kippur, entered the Kodesh Kedoshim, that entirely sublime and holy realm, and he survived and exited alive, it was cause for national celebration. Did we all enter the Kodesh Kedoshim. No, of course not! When one man stood there it was as if a part of each and every one of us touched and was touched by that sacred place. It's beyond a sense of collective pride and accomplishment. He truly represents the highest of our individual and national ambitions.

Unfortunately, when one lunatic acts out in a destructive way, everyone is shocked and deeply introspective. Why? It was the doing of one crazy person. Why all the personal angst? We understand there is great empathy for the victims but it gets everyone nervous about themselves. When Achan took spoils from Yericho, the entire Nation of Israel was blamed for the deed of one person. The Baalei Mussar explain that if one person did it, then 100,000 were quietly talking about it, and a few million were actively thinking about it. One person acted out on what too many others dreamed and fantasized about.

What is the difference between a crazy person and everyone else? One word! Filters! Before anything is manifest in the world it goes through three general check points, thought, speech, and action. Not everything we think about is spoken aloud. There is a filter between

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thought and speech. Not everything we speak about is acted upon. Again, there is a filter between what we say and what we are ready to act upon. Even in the world of thought, there is the thought of thought, the speech of thought, and the action of thought. A thought can be easily extinguished while it is just a thought of a thought.

A person thinks approximately 60,000 thoughts in the course of a day. To enter the Kodesh Kedoshim and survive one would probably have to be thinking 60,000 holy thoughts out of 60,000. That is 60,000 golden apples every day and all day. How many of our 60,000 thoughts are holy in the course of a day?

The Chofetz Chaim told a story about a young girl in the marketplace who was selling apples from her cart when a group of thieves came and started taking all of her apples. She was wailing about her plight and when a nearby vendor asked her why she was crying. She told him that the thieves are stealing all of her apples. He told her, "Why don't you steal some apples too!" So many of our thoughts are hijacked and stolen by the thieves of the world around us, but we can steal back some holy thoughts, some golden apples as well. When we identify with the accomplishment of the Kohain Gadol, we are identifying with the possibility that a person can live such a holy existence and we are cherishing our golden apples.

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez

The Sound of Silence

What are the right words to say to a mourner? What words can offer some measure of comfort? The answer is: nothing. There are no words that can offer any measure of appropriate comfort. That's why our Sages say that in a shiva house you should say nothing unless the mourner begins to speak. Otherwise, the only sound that is appropriate is the sound of silence.

"Vayidom Aharon, Aharon was silent." This was Aharon's reaction when facing the horrific, unexpected death of his two righteous children – silence. Silence is a profound language of the human heart. To be with somebody, doesn't require words.

In the Kaddish it says that only G-d is beyond words of comfort, and that is why the only words we say to the mourner is a prayer: "May G-d give you comfort..." since we cannot adequately comfort you, only He can...

**Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's
Derashot Ledorot**

Moving Beyond Respect*

In today's portion we read of the tragedy that struck Aaron, the High Priest of Israel, when his two sons were devoured by a fire from the Lord when they ministered in the Temple and changed part of the regulations. We read that Aaron was silent at the time of this tragedy. Probably the grief, the inner protest, was too overwhelming for him to say anything at all. At this moment Moses turns to his mourning brother and says to him, "Through those who are close to me will I be sanctified (ekadeish), and before the entire people will I be honored (ekaveid)" (Leviticus 10:3). What is it that Moses told his brother, and that he wished to impart to all posterity, at this time?

There are two concepts that are mentioned by Moses: kedusha, holiness, and kavod, honor or respect. Both of these are worthy Jewish goals deserving of our highest aspirations. Yet, they are not equal to each other – one is a higher level than the other. Kavod, honor, refers to an attitude that is external to the soul. I honor or respect somebody, but that does not necessarily mean that I subscribe to his opinions. I admire or give reverence to a great musician, although I may be absolutely flat and monotone. It is an external act of courtesy, a gesture that is sincere but does not involve my whole personality. Kedusha, holiness, contrariwise, implies an inner transformation, a total commitment and dedication of the entire personality toward the transcendent goal for which it strives. One can give kavod without being changed within. One cannot achieve kedusha until one has undergone a complete spiritual metamorphosis.

Now, kavod is something that the masses are capable of. Kedusha is something which only the initiates are capable of and obligated to achieve. Isaiah (6:3) proclaims even as we do thrice daily, "Holy holy holy is the Lord of Hosts, the world is full of his kavod." The Lord of Hosts, He who is above and beyond the world, is in His essence kadosh, holy. That is the highest realm and the highest level. But insofar as kol ha'aretz, the entire world, ordinary people, are concerned, all they can perceive is kavod, honor or respect.

Respect is a noble, good virtue. But it is antiseptic, it does not require the involvement of one's inner self. Sanctity, on the other hand, is a higher, deeper, profounder commitment. Therefore Moses said, "Before the entire people will I be honored," will I receive kavod. For ordinary people it is sufficient that they come into the Temple and minister, that they pray, that they observe the decorousness that is so appropriate in a House of God. For ordinary Jews, an attitude of kavod is about all that one can require of them. But when it comes to

kerovai, those who are close to God, then kavod is not by any means sufficient; then only the transcendent and lofty goal of kedusha, holiness, is worthwhile.

This, indeed, is what Moses told his brother Aaron. You may in your heart of hearts feel aggrieved – after all, your sons were ministering to God in the Temple, their heart was in the right place; so what if they changed a part of the service? The answer is: An attitude of kavod, honor for God, is sufficient for ordinary people. For priests, for the children of Aaron, however, kavod is never enough. From them I expect a total dedication, the uncompromising commitment to kedusha, to holiness. If your sons failed, it is because as kerovim, those close to God, they have failed to aspire to higher kedusha.

This is part of our problem in American Jewish life today. We suffer from what Prof. Abraham Joshua Heschel has called "a theology of respect." People come into the synagogue and they respect it – therefore they need not learn from it. They respect Torah, they respect Judaism, they respect religious people, they respect rabbis. And therefore the whole thing is externalized, it never penetrates within their hearts and souls. What is required is a sense of kerovai, of being close to God and therefore setting up as our ideal goal not only kavod but kedusha. In recent years, with the so-called return to religion that we have witnessed, it has often seemed to me that as religion has become respectable, it has tended to become unholy; with its gain in prestige and external acceptance, it has lost some of its passion, its power of criticism, its totality, its involvement with mankind's most basic and fundamental destiny.

The haftara of this week indicates the same idea. We read of the Ark being taken captive by the Philistines and then being recaptured by David. David was overjoyed at the return of the Ark to the Camp of Israel: "and David danced with all his might" (II Samuel 6:14). His sense of joy and thrill was excited by this great event, and so he responded in a blazing passion of holiness, realizing in practice the words he was to write later in the Psalms, "All my bones say: 'Lord who is like unto thee?'" (Psalms 35:10). And then we read, in one verse "The Ark of the Lord was brought to the city of David" (II Samuel 6:16) – the great and wonderful moment when the holiness of the ages was stamped indelibly upon the city of Jerusalem – and Michal the daughter of Saul watched from beyond the window." What a difference is revealed in the contrast between the attitude of David and that of his wife, the princess Michal! While David is involved with his people in the holy undertaking, she, the princess, heiress to the aristocratic traditions of her family, stands far and distant, remote and removed behind the pane of glass, watching

Likutei Divrei Torah

her husband David involved with his people and with his joy and with his faith " – and she despised him in her heart" (ii Samuel 6:16). She could not abide the whole theme of David dancing about the Ark. And so when her husband comes home to bless his home, she releases a torrent of abuse and reproach at him. How can you, she cries, dance there as though you were one of the commoners, with the maids and the servants and all the ordinary people? The whole corruptness of her attitude is revealed in two words in her first sarcastic barb at her husband: "ma nikhdad, what kind of honor, of respect, is it for the King of Israel to act the way you have?!"

This was the undoing of Michal the daughter of Saul. She was limited in her horizons. She could not see beyond the level of kavod. She was forever sealed off from a vision of kedusha. And therefore she did not understand that her husband had transcended the limits of kavod and had risen to the level of kedusha. No wonder that she was doomed to wither away and die and not leave any memory behind her.

This, then, must be our understanding, our duty and our ambition. It is important, of course, that our synagogues possess the element of kavod – of courtesy, of respect, of honor, of decorum. But it is far more important that they attain, as well, the ideals of kedusha – true devoutness, piety, and love of Torah.

When people come into a synagogue and listen to a sermon and they "enjoy" it – that is the level of kavod. When they are disturbed by it to the point of feeling they want to do something – then they are on their way to kedusha.

The rabbi who strives to institute decorum, respectability, and honor in his congregation, has made the steps towards kavod – an absolute prerequisite for a decent service. But that is not enough. The next step must be holiness, the establishment of a kehilla kedosha, a holy community. To be "inspired" by a synagogue, the services, and the sermon – that is kavod. To be moved by them to obey the message, to follow their line of thinking, to live the life of Torah – that is the beginning of the beginning of a life of kedusha, a life of holiness. [Excerpted from Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's *Derashot Ledorot: A Commentary for the Ages – Leviticus*, co-published by OU Press, Maggid Books, and YU Press; edited by Stuart. W. Halpern]

*March 23, 1957



BS'D

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When Does Shabbat End By Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Shabbat's Ending Time

What is Shabbat's ending time? It depends on the shul one attends. But why do these disparities exist? Why is there not one set time when Shabbat ends? The answer hinges on understanding the period known as Bein HaShemashot.

Bein HaShemashot

The Gemara refers to the period between sunset (Shekiah) and the appearance of three medium-size stars (Tzeit HaKochavim) as Bein HaShemashot. The Gemara (Shabbat 34b) writes that there is a Safek (doubt) about this period, whether it is day or night. Thus, the Gemara concludes that Halacha imposes stringencies on both days. For example, we begin Shabbat and Yom Tov at Shekiah and end these days only at Tzeit HaKochavim. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (Shiurim Lezecher Abba Mori z"l 1:97-104) cites the Ritva (Yoma 47b s.v. Amar Rabi Yochanan) who explains that Chazal did not consider Bein HaShemashot to be Safek day or night because of a lack of knowledge. Rather, Chazal believe Bein HaShemashot has aspects of both day and night. The Rav explains the dual identity of Bein HaShemashot as emerging from the two different standards of night and day of Sefer BeReishit's first chapter. By the standards of the first day of creation, Bein HaShemashot is considered day. On the first day of creation, the appearance of light distinguishes between night and day (BeReishit 1:5). On the fourth day of creation, though, the appearance of the sun determines day and night (BeReishit 1:14). Thus, by day one's standard, Bein HaShemashot is day because there is still light. However, by day four's standard, Bein HaShemashot is night because the sun no longer appears above the horizon.

Rabbeinu Tam and the Vilna Gaon

Poskim debate, though, about the precise contours of Bein HaShemashot. The unresolved debate between the Vilna Gaon and Rabbeinu Tam is its primary controversy. Tosafot (Shabbat 35a s.v. Trei) note an apparent contradiction between Shabbat 34-35 and Pesachim 94a. Shabbat 34-35 indicates that night begins thirteen and a half minutes after Shekiah or the time it takes for an average individual to walk three-quarters of a Mil (according to the Shulchan Aruch O.C. 261:2, a Mil is two thousand cubits; roughly three thousand five hundred feet). According to the Shulchan Aruch O.C. 459:2 and Rama O.C. 261:1 (but see the Bi'ur Halacha 459:2 s.v. v'im who cites dissenting views arguing it is 22.5 or 24 minutes), an average person walks a Mil in eighteen minutes. Thus, Shabbat 34-35 implies that night begins thirteen and a half minutes after Shekiah. However, Pesachim 94a points toward night beginning seventy-two minutes after Shekiah, or the time it takes to walk four Mil.

Rabbeinu Tam resolves the contradiction by explaining that nightfall or Tzeit HaKochavim occurs seventy-two minutes after the sun sets, following Pesachim 94a. Bein HaShemashot, in turn, begins thirteen and a half minutes before night or fifty-eight and a half minutes after sunset. Thus, according to Rabbeinu Tam, it is daytime until fifty-eight and a half minutes after sunset, and Bein HaShemashot is between fifty-eight and a half minutes after sunset until seventy-two minutes after sunset.

Many Rishonim concur with Rabbeinu Tam, including the Ramban (Torat Haadam, Inyan Aveilut Yeshana), the Rashba (commentary to Shabbat 35), the Ritva, (commentary to Shabbat 35), and the Ran (in his commentary to the Rif on Shabbat). The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 261:2; though see Shulchan Aruch Y.D. 266:9) codifies Rabbeinu Tam in the context of Hilchot Shabbat. Chassidim follow Rabbeinu Tam for stringencies and end Shabbat "late." They rely on Rabbeinu Tam for leniencies regarding rabbinic matters such as Tefillah times. This point explains why Chassidim daven Mincha long after sunset.

However, the Shach (Y.D. 266:11) cites the Teshuvot Maharam Alashkar, who believes that the Rif, Rambam, and Rosh (the Shulchan Aruch's three pillars) disagree with Rabbeinu Tam. Significantly, the Biur Halacha 261:2 s.v. Mitechilat notes that many Geonim (Rav Hai Gaon, Rav Nissim Gaon, and Rav Sherirah Gaon) also disagree with Rabbeinu Tam's approach. Most prominently, the Vilna Gaon (Biur Hagra to O.C. 261:2) marshals many proofs from the Gemara to reject Rabbeinu Tam. The Vilna Gaon believes that Shabbat 34-35 is the primary source teaching that night begins thirteen and a half minutes after sunset.

Sephardic Jews and non-Chassidic Ashkenazic Jews fundamentally follow the Vilna Gaon, although some accommodate Rabbeinu Tam regarding Shabbat's ending time (see Biur Halacha 261:2 s.v. Mitechilat and Shehu and Teshuvot Yabia Omer 2: O.C. 21; although Rav Shmuel Khoshkermann observes that Rav Yosef Chaim of Baghdad in his Ben Ish Chai does not mention Rabbeinu Tam's view). I heard Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik state in shiur that he follows Rabbeinu Tam regarding the ending time of Shabbat and Yom Kippur.

The Vilna Gaon clarifies that thirteen and a half minutes applies only in Jerusalem on the equinox. The time must be adjusted according to the season and distance from the equator. There is considerable debate whether Rabbeinu Tam's seventy-two minutes also varies with time and place.

The Compromise - The Appearance of Three Stars

The Vilna Gaon was particularly critical of the notion that it remains daytime for fifty-eight and a half minutes after sunset. However, saying it is night only thirteen and a half minutes after sunset also is counterintuitive. Thus, common practice adopts a compromise based on Shabbat 35b, which states that Bein HaShemashot ends with the appearance of three medium-sized stars.

The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 293:2) adds that the stars should be small-sized since it is difficult to determine if they are medium-sized (it is better to err on caution). In addition, he says that the stars must be clustered together. The Mishna Berura (293:5) explains that this latter requirement stems from the Mitzva to add to Shabbat.

Common practice is to gauge Shabbat's ending time based on these criteria, thereby avoiding Rabbeinu Tam and the Vilna Gaon's extremes. While it does not satisfy Rabbeinu Tam's Shabbat ending time, it exceeds the Vilna Gaon's. We may call this compromise "the Vilna Gaon-plus approach."

Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Approaches

Modern-day illumination makes it difficult to discern three small stars, and Poskim have shifted to giving equivalents in minutes. Since it is not an exact determination, many different numerical equivalents are set forth. Rav Yosef Adler told me that Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik said to him that forty minutes after sunset in the New York area suffice. Rav Gavriel Elbaz told me that Rav Yitzchak Yosef also prefers Shabbat to end no earlier than forty minutes after sunset in the New York area (this is our practice in Teaneck's Congregation Shaarei Orah).

The Agudath Harabbanim, a prominent mid-twentieth-century New York-based rabbinic organization, ruled that Shabbat in the New York area ends forty minutes after Shekiah. Finally, Rav Moshe Feinstein, Teshuvot Igrot Moshe O.C. 4:62 writes that Shabbat ends forty-five to fifty-one minutes after sunset in the New York area.

On the Israeli side, Rav Yechiel Michel Tucazinsky (Sefer Bein HaShemashot, p.51) believes that Shabbat ends thirty-two to forty-three minutes after sunset in Jerusalem (Bein HaShemashot is shorter the closer one is located to the equator). Most interestingly, both Rav Moshe and Rav Tucazinsky's numbers emerge to the equivalent of the sun being 8.5 degrees below the horizon. In other words, the sun is 8.5 degrees below the horizon fifty-one minutes after sunset in the summer in the New York area and forty-three minutes after a summer sunset in the Jerusalem region.

Based on this standard, the popular Myzmanim website posts its times for Shabbat's end in locations worldwide. Shabbat, according to their approach, ends when the sun reaches 8.5 degrees below the horizon wherever one is located.

Conclusion

Now we understand the reason behind the discrepancies between different shuls regarding Shabbat's ending time. Each approach is valid as they all seek a Vilna Gaon-plus result that matches the appearance of three small stars in a cluster.

For an in-depth discussion of this issue, see Rav Mordechai Willig, Am Mordechai Berachot pp.11-16, and the many contemporary Sefarim that he cites that address this topic at great length.

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date: Apr 23, 2025, 7:01 PM

Rav Frand Parshas Shemini

The Requirement of Jewish Leadership: A Feeling of Unworthiness

This dvar Torah was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape# 93, Melacha Before Havdala. Good Shabbos!

The pasuk by the culmination of the Shivas Yemei Meluim (the Seven Days of consecration or dedication) of the Mishkan says, "And Moshe said to Aharon, draw near to the Altar and offer your Sin Offering and your Burnt Offering and atone for yourself and for the nation..." (Vayikra 9:7) Rashi cites an interesting Toras Kohanim. Aharon was embarrassed at this point about going over and doing the Avodah (Temple Service). Moshe asked, "Why are you hesitant? This is what you were chosen for!"

Another Toras Kohanim says that Aharon saw the Mizbayach (Altar) appear to him in the form of an ox and he was afraid to approach. Moshe told him to get up the courage and approach the Mizbayach.

What do Chazal mean when they say that the Mizbayach appeared like an ox? It does not take a great darshan to suggest that the purpose was to remind Aharon of the aveira (sin) of the Eigel Hazahav (Golden Calf). However, if that was the case, shouldn't the Medrash have said that the Mizbayach appeared to Aharon like a calf, rather than like an ox?

I saw a beautiful pshat (interpretation) from Rav Shlomo Breuer. The pasuk in Tehillim (106:19-20) says, "They made a calf in Chorev... and they switched their allegiance to the form of an ox." We see that the aveira started out as a calf, and somehow developed into an ox. Rav Shlomo Breuer says in the name of his father-in-law, Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, that Klal Yisroel never intended for it to be real Avodah Zarah. They did not want to switch gods. Rather, they wanted an intermediary. They were afraid that Moshe had died and they wanted someone in his stead.

Aharon did something that, in retrospect, we need to say was a mistake. Aharon made a concession and said, "They want an intermediary? I will pick something for them that there is no way they will ever be able to transform it and give it any power. I will pick a weak little calf. How can anybody think that a little calf can become a god?"

What happened? The concession snow-balled and grew from being merely a calf and turned into the form of an ox — something having its own power. This was Aharon's role in the aveira of the Eigel — making the concession of the calf that grew into an ox. That is why the Mizbayach appeared to him now in the form of an ox.

Now we can understand what Chazal mean. Aharon was afraid to become the Kohen Gadol (High Priest). He thought, "I once had my try at leadership. I once tried to be a leader and I failed. I gave into the people. I made a concession when I should have said a firm 'No.'" As a result of that concession, the calf became an ox. That is why Aharon was hesitant. He felt that he was not cut out for the job.

Moshe told him, "Why are you hesitant? This is the very reason you were chosen!" One of the requirements of a Jewish leader is to have such a sense of hesitancy, a feeling of unworthiness. A leader who campaigns for the position and says "I am the best man for the job" is not a Jewish leader! There was once a Jew who had such feelings. He thought that he was the right man for the job. That man's name was Korach. We all know what happened to Korach. Such a person is not worthy to be the leader.

Hesitancy, embarrassment, intimidation, and humility are the very essence of what is needed to be worthy of assuming Jewish leadership.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com
Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Shmini is provided below ... A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2023 by Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/> learn@torah.org (410) 602-1350

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The Mysterious Disqualification of the Chasidah Bird

Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

Onenon-kosher bird referenced in this week's Torah reading receives disproportionate attention because of its name: the "Chasidah" (Lev. 11:19, often translated as "stork"), which sounds as if it is derived from chesed, or kindness. Rashi, citing the Talmud (Chulin 63a), tells us that is indeed the case: it is so named because "it acts with kindness, chesed, to its friends, in sharing its food".

This seems surprising: a common theory, notably, articulated by Maimonides in his Guide to the Perplexed, is that those birds that are not kosher or designated as such because they have a predatory nature, and consuming them would have a negative effect on one's soul. How, then, did the Chasidah, named after its kindness, receive the status?

This question bothered the Torah Temimah, so much so that he preferred other etymologies, unrelated to kindness, against the Talmudic interpretation, citing the Ibn Ezra and Vilna Gaon to that effect.

One popular explanation is to claim that the Chasidah is deemed not kosher because it's kindness is expressed specifically "to its friends", and is thus apparently exclusive in its nature.

However, this explanation seems difficult as well. No one has infinite resources to take care of everyone, and Jewish law does indeed have priorities as to how those resources should be spent, including requiring first taking care of those one is closest to. It seems unfair that this bird should be considered not kosher for acting in a way no different than that expected of benevolent people.

Rather, the point is presumably a more basic one. The Chasidah is not kosher because it is a predator, just like all of the other birds in that category. The fact that it is nice to its friends does not change that reality. (My grandfather, in his commentary *Meshivat Nefesh*, indicates this understanding.) This indeed teaches a crucial lesson for humans: evil is not excused just because it is inconsistently expressed. If you are a Nazi, or a terrorist, we don't care that you also love animals or are nice to your mother.

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YU TORAH IN PRINT • Shemini 5785

from: Orthodox Union <alerts@ounetwork.org>

date: Apr 24, 2025, 11:57 AM

Rabbi Moshe Hauer Yom HaShoah 5785 – The Holocaust and the Mezuzah Today is Yom HaShoah, a day of commemoration of the Holocaust and an opportunity to consider the relevant lessons of our complex history. Anyone needing help with the transition from the celebration of Pesach to today's remembrance of Jewish tragedy can simply look at the pictures taken following the arson attack on the home of Governor Josh Shapiro of Pennsylvania. While we thank God for the failure of that hate driven attempted mass murder, we remain shocked by the images of the charred remains of the Haggadah, Seder plate, and Yom Tov candles from the Shapiros' just-concluded family Seder. Eighty years after the Holocaust, our sense of security in America continues to be deeply shaken.

These images are exceptionally sobering to us as people of emunah, faith. Protection and security are almost assured on the leil shimurim, the Seder night commemorating God's protection of the Jews as He passed over our homes and struck the Egyptians. Even the mezuzah that adorns our doorposts and safeguards our homes year-round commemorates the security attained by the original placement on our doorposts of the blood of the Pesach offering (see Ramban Shemot 13:16). Can we allow that sense of faith and security to go up in the flames that scorched the Shapiros' Haggadah?

To the contrary. It is there that we will find the key to our survival.

Consider this: How would we have reacted to Moshe's command to offer the Pesach? The Egyptians worshipped the sheep that the Jews had been told to slaughter, prompting Moshe to reject Pharaoh's earlier proposal that the Jews worship their God in Egypt. "How can we slaughter the gods of the Egyptians before their eyes and not expect them to stone us?!" Yet Moshe was now telling the Jews to do precisely that and to not be shy about it. Instead, they were to offend Egyptian sensibilities while making themselves sitting ducks, prominently labeling their homes as targets of Egyptian anger by placing the blood of the offering on their doorposts while being confined to stay in those homes throughout the night.

We would likely have resisted. "Moshe, let's stick to plan A. Why should we risk everything, angering the Egyptians by being boldly and offensively our Jewish selves? Let's instead keep our heads down for just one more night and stay out of trouble, delaying our worship, removing our yarmulkas, and tucking in our Chai necklaces until we are safely out of the country."

Left to our own devices, we would have failed to recognize that the history of the Jewish people has demonstrated time and again that our future is jeopardized when we hide our faith and most secure when we live and worship proudly as Jews. The mezuzah we place on our doorpost is not a mystical amulet providing a magical zone of immediate security; it is a repeat of what we had to do on that first Seder night to become the eternal nation, boldly labeling our homes as Jews dedicated to the service of God, letting the world know who we are and what we believe in. And while it

certainly the case that this kind of boldness can invite immediate trouble, it remains the clearest path to the Divinely guided long-term survival of the Jewish people.

The image of the charred Haggadah is a sobering reminder that eighty years after the Holocaust vicious hatred persists even in the land of the free, but it also highlights the key to our survival. While America was experiencing a tsunami of antisemitism, the Jewish family that lived in Pennsylvania's governor's mansion proudly and publicly celebrated Passover, recalling God's miracles then and His presence now, affirming what has made the Jews outlive all those who have stood up against us to destroy us in every generation.

The Holocaust did not teach us to hide but to be strong and proud as Jews, to bring our people home to Israel, the land of Jewish destiny, and to affirm our faith in His protection of His people always.

"Inscribe these words on the doorposts of your house and on your gates so that you and your children may endure in the land that Hashem promised to your ancestors for as long as the sky endures over the land."

Sincerely,

Rabbi Moshe Hauer
Executive Vice President

The Rabbi Sacks Legacy <info@rabbisacks.org>

Thu, Apr 24, 11:15 AM

Food for Thought

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l

The second half of Exodus and the first part of Leviticus form a carefully structured narrative. The Israelites are commanded to construct a Sanctuary. They carry out the command. This is followed by an account of sacrifices to be offered there. Then, in the first part of this week's Parsha, the Kohanim - the Priests - are inducted into office.

What happens next, though, is unexpected: the dietary laws are presented, a list of permitted and forbidden species, animals, fish and birds. What is the logic of these laws? And why are they placed here? What is their connection with the Sanctuary?

The late R. Elie Munk offered a fascinating suggestion.^[1] As we have mentioned before in these studies, the Sanctuary was a human counterpart of the cosmos. Several key words in the biblical account of its construction are also key words in the narrative of creation at the beginning of Genesis. The Talmud (Megillah 10b) says about the completion of the Sanctuary, that "On that day there was joy before the Holy One blessed be He as on the day when Heaven and Earth were created." The universe is the home God made for humanity. The Sanctuary was the home human beings made for God."

R. Munk reminds us that the first command God gave the first human was a dietary law. "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." The dietary laws in Shemini parallel the prohibition given to Adam. As then, so now, a new era in the spiritual history of humankind, preceded by an act of creation, is marked by laws about what one may and may not eat.

Why? As with sex, so with eating: these are the most primal activities, shared with many other forms of life. Without sex there is no continuation of the species. Without food, even the individual cannot survive. These, therefore, have been the focus of radically different cultures. On the one hand there are hedonistic cultures in which food and sex are seen as pleasures and pursued as such. On the other are ascetic cultures – marked by monastic seclusion – in which sex is avoided and eating kept to a minimum. The former emphasise the body, the latter the soul. Judaism, by contrast, sees the human situation in terms of integration and balance. We are body and soul. Hence the Judaic imperative, neither hedonistic nor ascetic, but transformative. We are commanded to sanctify the activities of eating and sex. From this flow the dietary laws and the laws of family purity (niddah and mikveh), two key elements of kedushah, the life of holiness.

However, we can go further. Genesis 1 is not the only account of Creation in Tanach, the Hebrew Bible. There are several others. One is contained in the last chapters of the Book of Job. It is this that deserves close attention. Job is the paradigm of the righteous individual who suffers. He loses all he has, for no apparent reason. His companions tell him that he must have sinned. Only this can reconcile his fate with justice. Job maintains his innocence and demands a hearing in the heavenly tribunal. For some 37 chapters the argument rages, then in chapter 38 God addresses Job "out of the whirlwind". God offers no answers. Instead, for four chapters, He asks questions of His own, rhetorical questions that have no answer:

"Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?... Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?... Does the rain have a father?... From whose womb comes the ice?"

God shows Job the whole panoply of creation, but it is a very different view of the universe than that set out in Genesis 1-2. There the centre of the narrative is the human person, the last to be created; made in God's image; given dominion over all that lives. In Job 38-41 we see not an anthropocentric, but a theocentric, universe. Job is the only person in Tanach who sees the world, as it were, from God's point of view.

Particularly striking is the way these chapters deal with the animal kingdom. What Job sees are not domestic animals, but wild, untameable creatures, magnificent in their strength and beauty, living far from and utterly indifferent to humankind:

Do you give the horse his strength or clothe his neck with a flowing mane?
Do you make him leap like a locust, striking terror with his proud snorting?...
Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom and spread his wings toward the south?

Does the eagle soar at your command and build his nest on high?...
Can you pull in the Leviathan with a fishhook or tie down his tongue with a rope?

Can you put a cord through his nose or pierce his jaw with a hook?...

Nothing on Earth is His equal - a creature without fear.

He looks down on all that are haughty;
He is King over all that are proud.

This is the most radically non-anthropocentric passage in the Hebrew Bible. It tells us that man is not the centre of the universe, nor are we the measure of all things. Some of the most glorious aspects of nature have nothing to do with human needs, and everything to do with the Divine creation of diversity. One of the few Jewish thinkers to state this clearly was Moses Maimonides:

I consider the following opinion as most correct according to the teaching of the Bible and the results of philosophy, namely that the universe does not exist for man's sake, but that each being insists for its own sake, and not because of some other thing. Thus we believe in Creation, and yet need not inquire what purpose is served by each species of existing things, because we assume that God created all parts of the universe by His will; some for their own sake, and some for the sake of other beings... Guide for the Perplexed, III:13

And again:

Consider how vast are the dimensions and how great the number of these corporeal beings. If the whole of the earth would not constitute even the smallest part of the sphere of the fixed stars, what is the relation of the human species to all these created things, and how can any of us imagine that they exist for his sake and that they are instruments for his benefit? Guide for the Perplexed, III:14

We now understand what is at stake in the prohibition of certain species of animals, birds and fish, many of them predators like the creatures described in Job 38-41. They exist for their own sake, not for the sake of humankind. The vast universe, and earth itself with the myriad species it contains, has an integrity of its own. Yes, after the Flood, God gave humans permission to eat meat, but this was a concession, as if to say: Kill if you must, but let it be animals, not other humans, that you kill.

With His covenant with the Israelites, God invites humanity to begin a new chapter in history. This is not yet the Garden of Eden, paradise regained. But

with the construction of the Sanctuary – a symbolic home for the Divine presence on earth – something new has begun. One sign of this is the fact that the Israelites are not permitted to kill any and every life-form for food. Some species must be protected, given their freedom, granted their integrity, left unsubjected to human devices and desires. The new creation – the Sanctuary – marks a new dignity for the old creation, especially its wild, untamed creatures. Not everything in the universe was made for human consumption.

[1] Elie Munk, *The Call of the Torah*, vol. 2, p. 99

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l was a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and the moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years.

Tidbits • Parashas Shemini 5785

Ira Zlotowitz <IraZ@klalgovoa.org>

In Memory of Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz zt"l

Parashas Shemini • April 26th • 28 Nissan 5785

This week is Shabbos Mevorach Chodesh Iyar. Rosh Chodesh is on Monday & Tuesday, April 28-29. The molad is Sunday night at 8:30 PM and 2 chalakim. The first opportunity for Kiddush Levana is Wednesday evening, April 30th. The final opportunity is Sunday night, May 11th. Tachanun and the Yehi Ratzons following Kerias Hatorah are not recited until after Rosh Chodesh Iyar. Despite being Shabbos Mevorach, Av Harachamim is recited in most shuls, due to the somber nature of the sefirah mourning period. Tzidkascha is omitted at Minchah on Shabbos. For this Shabbos, the Shabbos following Pesach, some have the custom to bake a Shliessel Challah. Minhagim include baking a challah in the shape of a key, or baking an actual key within it, among other variations. Sefirah: On Friday night we count the 13th day of the Omer. Pirkei Avos: Perek 1 Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Makkos 18. The siyum is next Friday, May 2nd; mazal tov! Maseches Shevuos begins next and is just 48 blatt • Yerushalmi: Eruvin 38 • Mishnah Yomis: Avodah Zarah 2:7-3:1 • Oraysa (coming week): Taanis 8a-10a • Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: 79:2-End. The series of fast days of BeHaB begins on Monday, May 5th. Pesach Sheini is on Monday, May 12th. Lag Ba'omer is on Friday, May 16th. Shavuos is on Monday and Tuesday, June 2nd-3rd. SHEMINI: The offerings on the eighth day, Rosh Chodesh Nissan, after the Seven Days of Inauguration • Moshe and Aharon bless the people •

Hashem's glory is revealed • Nadav and Avihu offer unauthorized incense; their neshamos leave them as Hashem's fire enters their nostrils • Moshe comforts Aharon, Aharon is silent • Aharon and his surviving sons are instructed not to show signs of mourning • Kohanim may not serve - and no Jew may render a halachic decision - after drinking wine • Moshe instructs Aharon and his sons to eat of the day's offerings • The Chatas of Rosh Chodesh is completely burned; Moshe is angered that it was not eaten • Aharon explains his rationale for burning that Korban; Moshe admits that Aharon is correct • Laws of kosher and non-kosher animals, fish, birds and insects • Various forms of tumah Haftarah: The parashah and haftarah (Shmuel II 6:1-7:17) discuss the holiness of the Beis Hamikdash and its vessels, and the reverence warranted for its sanctity. The sons of Aharon Hakohen, as well as Uza in this haftarah, erred in their interactions with holiness and passed away immediately.

Parashas Shemini • 91 Pesukim • 6 Obligations • 11 Prohibitions 1) A Kohen may not enter the Mikdash with long hair. 2) A Kohen may not enter the Mikdash with torn clothes. 3) A Kohen may not leave the Mikdash while in the midst of avodah. 4) A Kohen may not enter the Mikdash after drinking wine. 5) Do not eat non-kosher animals. 6) Check animals for their signs of kashrus. 7) Check fish for their signs of kashrus. 8) Do not eat non-kosher fish. 9) Do not eat non-kosher birds. 10) Check for the signs of kashrus of creeping creatures. 11) Tumah of the eight dead sheratzim. 12) Tumah regarding foods. 13) Tumah of a neveilah (dead animal). 14) Do not eat crawling sheratzim. 15) Do not eat sheratzim that live in plants. 16) Do not eat amphibious sheratzim. 17) Do not eat maggots. Mitzvah Highlight: The Sefer HaChinuch explains that the Torah forbids certain foods due to their

harmful effects on the nefesh. Just as we would never second-guess a doctor's advice without fully understanding the workings of the human body, so too we cannot doubt the negative impact of forbidden foods, as we cannot comprehend the lofty nature and holiness of the Jewish nefesh.

"אתה לא תקוץ פְּנַדְעָוָת וְאַתָּה תְּסַפֵּקָה"

"These shall you abominate from among the fowl...the chasidah" (Vayikra 11:19) The Sefer Hachinuch explains that non-kosher birds are forbidden because they engage in negative behavior, and these instincts can influence the person who consumes them. Among the forbidden species is a bird called chasidah. Rashi explains that the chasidah earned its name from its characteristic of doing chessed by sharing its food with friends. This seems to be a praiseworthy characteristic; if so, why is the chasidah forbidden? The Chiddushei HaRim explains that while the chasidah engages in chessed, it does so only for its friends; only those in its own circle benefit from the kindness. This discriminatory behavior makes the chasidah unfit for Jewish consumption, as the Torah wants us to give freely without discrimination against "outsiders". A Jew is responsible for any fellow Jew's needs - even for those far from himself, whether literally or figuratively. A Jew must do chessed simply because he is commanded to do so by Hashem, and not only when he is sympathetic to the recipient or his cause.

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When Religion Is Based on Lies, It Becomes Meaningless –

Better an Ugly Truth than a Beautiful Lie

Essay by Rabbi YY Jacobson

Seven Refrigerators

The rule in Israel at one time was that a new immigrant could bring in ordinary household items duty free. But anything that looked like as if it was for resale in Israel was supposed to be subject to import taxes.

Jack Levine, a new oreh, goes to the Haifa port to claim his household goods that have arrived by ship. The officer notices on the manifest that Jack is bringing in seven refrigerators.

"Mr. Levine," says the officer, "one refrigerator is allowed duty free, not seven."

"But I'm very religious (frum,) and I need one refrigerator just for meat, one just for dairy, and one just for parve," says Jack.

"All right," says the officer with a sigh, "that makes three. But seven?"

"Well, of course," says Jack, "I need three for most of the year and another three, meat, dairy, and parve, for Pesach."

"OK," says the officer, losing patience. "That makes six. What's the seventh one for?"

"Nu, so what if I like to eat a little treif once in a while?"

A Lesson in Integrity

Few things are as necessary to a life of serenity as integrity. In October 1985, the famous racquetball player Reuben Gonzolas was in the final match of his first professional racquetball tournament. He was playing the perennial champion for his first shot at a victory on the pro circuit. At match point in the fifth and final game, Gonzolas made a super "kill shot" into the front corner to win the tournament. The referee called it good, and one of the linemen confirmed the shot was a winner.

But after a moment's hesitation, Gonzolas turned and declared that his shot had skipped into the wall, hitting the floor first. As a result, the serve went to his opponent, who went on to win the match.

Reuben Gonzolas walked off the court; everyone was stunned. The next issue of National Racquetball Magazine featured Gonzolas on its cover. The lead editorial searched and questioned for an explanation for this first ever occurrence on the professional racquetball circuit. Who could ever imagine this in any sport or endeavor? Here was a player with everything in his favor, with victory in his grasp, who disqualifies himself at match point and loses.

When asked why he did it, Gonzolas replied simply, "It was the only thing I could do to maintain my integrity."

Gonzolas can teach us all a lesson: you will never be a winner if you haven't really won.

It is a lesson the Torah conveys in this week's portion in a very powerful way.

What is Kosher?

It seems nothing more than a question of syntax. But the sages across the generations understood that what appears as a flaw in biblical syntax and grammar contains invaluable insight into the human condition.

In this week's portion, we learn of the identifying signs of a kosher land animal: it must chew its cud (meaning it ruminates and its partially digested food returns to its mouth for further chewing and digesting), and it must have split-hooves.[1] Hence, the cow, sheep, goat, deer, gazelle, and even giraffe, are kosher. The donkey and the horse, on the other hand, lack both of these features and are not kosher.

The Torah then lists four animals that possess only one of these signs and are deemed not kosher. They are the camel, the hyrax, the hare, and the pig. The camel, hyrax, and hare while chewing their cud, do not have split feet, and the pig while having split feet does not chew its cud. These animals are classified as temeim, non-kosher.

In the words of the Torah:[2]

אַתָּה־זֶה, לֹא תֹאכְלֹו, מִמְעָלָיו גַּגְרָה, וּמִמְפְּרָסִי הַפְּרָסָה: אַתָּה־גָּבְלָל פִּ-מְעָלָה גַּגְרָה הַוָּא, וּפְרָסָה אַתָּה־גָּבְלָל פִּ-מְעָלָה גַּגְרָה הַוָּא, וּפְרָסָה, לֹא יִקְרְבֶּסֶת; שְׁמָא הַוָּא, אַנְיָנוּ מִפְּרָסִי—טְמֵא הַוָּא, לְכָם. וְאַתָּה־גָּבְלָל גַּגְרָה הַוָּא, וּפְרָסָה; שְׁמָא הַוָּא, לְכָם. וְאַתָּה־גָּבְלָל גַּגְרָה הַוָּא, וְשַׁעַרְעָשָׁעָרָה, לְכָם. וְאַתָּה־גָּבְלָל גַּגְרָה הַוָּא, וְנָזָא דָוָא, לְכָם.

But these animals you shall not eat... the camel, because it brings up its cud, and does not have a [completely] cloven hoof; it is unclean for you. And the hyrax, because it brings up its cud, and does not have a [completely] split hoof; it is unclean for you. And the hare, because it brings up its cud, but does not have a [completely] cloven hoof; it is unclean for you; And the pig, because it has a hoof that is completely split, and does not regurgitate its cud; it is unclean for you.

Two Questions

There are two important questions here.

First, why does the Torah single out these four one-signed animals as non-kosher? Why does the Torah not say simply, that any animal which lacks any or both of the two signs, is not-kosher? Just as it does not specify all of the animals which lack both signs (nor does it specify the animals which possess both signs) it need not specify the names of the four animals which have one sign.[3]

Second, when the Torah presents the reason for these animals not being kosher, it does so in a very strange fashion, mentioning its kosher factor as the primary cause for its non-kosher status: "But these animals you shall not eat... the camel, because it brings up its cud, and does not have a cloven hoof... And the pig, because it has a hoof that is completely split, and does not regurgitate its cud."

We would expect the Torah to state it differently: "The camel because it does not have a cloven hoof, even though it chews its cud... the pig because it doesn't chew its cud, even though it has split hooves.

If you wanted to explain to someone why he is not an American citizen, you would not say: "You are not a citizen of this country because your parents were born here, but you were not." The proper way of saying it would be: "You're not a citizen because you were not born here, even though your parents were born here."

Yet in our case, the Torah does the exact opposite, stating that the camel or pig are not kosher because they possess one kosher sign, and are devoid of the second kosher sign.

Stop the Lie

It was the Keli Yakar, the commentary on the Torah authored by Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim of Luntschitz, 1550—1619,[4] who deduced from this an astonishing message.[5] It is not only what these animals lack that deemed them un-kosher, but also that which they do have, the one kosher sign, that makes them non-kosher. The camel is treif because it chews its cud (and

lacks split hooves); the pig is treif because it has split hooves (and does not chew its cud).

Why? Because possessing one kosher sign allows these animals, symbolically speaking, to deceive themselves and others that they are kosher by "showing off" the single kosher sign.[6] So the Torah is telling us: Don't eat "the camel, because it brings up its cud, and does not have a cloven hoof... And the pig, because it has a hoof that is completely split, and does not regurgitate its cud." It is also—and primarily—the single deceptive kosher sign that deems these animals unsuitable for Jewish consumption. And that is why the Torah specifies these four animals, not including them with all other animals who lack both of the kosher signs: All animals lacking both signs are not kosher because of what they lack; with these four animals, it is not only what they lack, but also what they have which deems them unkosher.

Human Dishonesty

Of course, these animals are not hypocritical and dishonest by nature. Animals are usually honest. Rather, their physical characteristics are symbolic of moral qualities, and when we eat them, these qualities affect our psyches, like all food, which has a deep impact on the consumer.

Each of us must struggle against various unhealthy and immoral, non-kosher instincts, appetites, habits, addictions, and cravings. But there is something that can sometimes be more lethal for our well-being: dishonesty about who we are.

What causes me to become un-kosher is not so much that I am not kosher, as much as it is me deceiving myself and making believe that I am kosher. The greatest enemy of true religion, of any authentic relationship with G-d, is to be dishonest about my identity.

Yet, sadly, we often observe the opposite. Some religious circles thrive on dishonesty, on people making believe they are morally "perfect," and have no unkosher struggles. The more you "fit in" and do not reveal your truth to anybody, the more you are accepted and the more religious you are considered, when in truth it is all a sham.

In many communities and schools, people feel the pressure to always say and feel the "right things;" they are frightened to be vulnerable about their genuine emotions and struggles. They feel the need to live the lie that they are perfectly "kosher," even if that means that they need to cover up a part of themselves.

Nothing can be further from the truth: the foundation of a moral and meaningful life is that I can be real and "naked" with G-d, with myself, and with my close friends; that I can expose myself without facades. When religion is based on lies, it loses its purpose. In the world of the Torah, the ugly truth is superior to the beautiful lie.[7]

This does not mean that I must fall prey to every struggle and surrender to every appetite. Often, I must subdue my cravings to live up to my true calling and essence. I need to confront and battle my addictions and bad habits. But I must never deny who I am and what I am dealing with. I must show up to G-d with my entire self, not with a psychologically mutilated sense of existence.

Forcing yourself to be someone else to gain popularity, and not having the integrity to be brutally honest with yourself, leaves you drained, empty, and spiritually dead. There is no spirituality without full honesty.

The Two Candidates

In the mid-1980s, researchers at Cleveland State University made a startling discovery. They conducted an experiment by creating two fictitious job candidates, David and John. The candidates had identical resumes and letters of reference. The only difference was that John's letter included the sentence "Sometimes, John can be difficult to get along with." They showed the resumes to a number of personnel directors. Which candidate did the personnel directors overwhelmingly prefer?

The one who was difficult to get along with, John.

The researchers concluded that the criticism of John made praise of John more believable. Admitting John's wart actually helped sell him.

It is this lesson that the Torah communicates in Shmini. Admitting flaws gives you more credibility, even in your own eyes. Psychological vulnerability is the key to a meaningful life.

The Man in the Glass

I once read a poem, entitled "The Man in the Glass:"
When you get what you want in your struggle for self and the world makes you king for a day,
Just go to the mirror and look at yourself and see what that man has to say.
For it isn't your father or mother or wife whose judgment upon you must pass,
the fellow whose verdict counts most in your life is the one staring back from the glass.
He's the fellow to please – never mind all the rest. For he's with you clear to the end.

And you've passed your most difficult test if the man in the glass is your friend.

You may fool the whole world down the pathway of years, and get pats on the back as you pass;
But your final reward will be heartache and tears if you've cheated the man in the glass.

The Seed

Let me tell you a story.

Once there was a beloved emperor in a small country who was growing old and knew it was coming time to choose his successor. Instead of choosing one of his assistants or one of his own children, he decided to do something different.

He called all the young people in the kingdom together one day. He said, "It has come time for me to step down and to choose the next emperor. I have decided to choose one of you." The kids were shocked! But the emperor continued: "I am going to give each one of you a seed today. One seed. It is a very special seed. I want you to go home, plant the seed, water it and come back here one year from today with what you have grown from this one seed. I will then judge the plants that you bring to me, and the one I choose will be the next emperor of the kingdom!"

There was one boy named Ling who was there that day and he, like the others, received a seed. He went home and excitedly told his mother the whole story. She helped him get a pot and some planting soil, and he planted the seed and watered it carefully. Every day he would water it and watch to see if it had grown.

After about three weeks, some of the other youths began to talk about their seeds and the plants that were beginning to grow. Ling kept going home and checking his seed, but nothing ever grew. Three weeks, four weeks, five weeks, two months, and three months, went by. Still nothing.

By now others were talking about their plants but Ling didn't have a plant, and he felt like a failure. Six months went by, and still nothing in Ling's pot. He just knew he had killed his seed. Everyone else had tall plants, but he had nothing. Ling didn't say anything to his friends; he just kept waiting for his seed to grow.

A year finally went by and all the youths of the kingdom brought their plants to the emperor for inspection. Ling told his mother that he wasn't going to take an empty pot. But she encouraged him to go, to take his pot, and to be honest about what happened. Ling felt sick to his stomach, but he knew his mother was right. He took his empty pot to the palace.

When Ling arrived, he was amazed at the variety of plants grown by all the other youths. They were beautiful, in all shapes and sizes. Ling put his empty pot on the floor and many of the other kinds laughed at him. A few felt sorry for him and just said, "Hey, nice try."

When the emperor arrived, he surveyed the room and greeted the young people. Ling just tried to hide in the back. "My, what great plants, trees, and flowers you have grown," said the emperor. "Today, one of you will be appointed the next emperor!"

All of a sudden, the emperor spotted Ling at the back of the room with his empty pot. He ordered him to come to the front. Ling was terrified. "The emperor knows I'm a failure! Maybe he will have me penalized!"

When Ling got to the front, the Emperor asked his name. "My name is Ling," he replied. All the kids were laughing and making fun of him. The emperor asked everyone to quiet down. He looked at Ling, and then announced to the crowd, "Behold your new emperor! His name is Ling!" Ling couldn't believe it. Ling couldn't even grow his seed. How could he be the new emperor?

Then the emperor said, "One year ago today, I gave everyone here a seed. I told you to take the seed, plant it, water it, and bring it back to me today. But I gave you all boiled seeds which would not grow. All of you, except Ling, have brought me trees and plants and flowers. When you found that the seed would not grow, you substituted another seed for the one I gave you. Ling was the only one with the courage and honesty to bring me a pot with my seed in it. Therefore, he is the one who will be the new leader!"

This is a metaphor for life. Each of us was given his or her "seed," his or her body, psyche, and soul. The saddest thing you can do is try to mimic other people because you dislike your own seed; to live your life based on other people's expectations, so that you gain their approval and feel successful, even if that means repressing your own seed and using the seed of another. Only when you become completely honest with your own condition and reality, confessing that your seed has grown nothing, can you truly make something of yourself and become a genuine source of leadership and inspiration to yourself and others. Only when you can embrace the truth of your soul, can you discover the infinite light of G-d that radiates through you.

[1] Leviticus chapter 11. [2] Leviticus 11:4-7 [3] One explanation for this is that this serves as a proof that Torah is Divine. As the Talmud puts it (Chulin 60b, and Sefri to Deuteronomy 14:7), "Was Moses a hunter or an explorer?" How did he know that there would be no other animals that would be discovered with one sign and not the other? No man would have the audacity to make a binding list of four, if not for the fact that the Torah was dictated to him by the creator of all of the animals. (See Talmud Chulin 59a, Torah Temimah Leviticus 11 section 17.) It is a fascinating fact: after thousands of years and the discoveries of untold new animal species, we have not discovered any animals with one kosher sign that do not belong to the camel family or the pig family. For in all other animals, the two signs work in sync: either they possess them both, or lack them both. This is incredible. Why would the author of the Torah write a book in the name of G-d knowing that he may be proven a liar once new animals are discovered?! Some argue that this proof is hard to understand scientifically today because what we call today the hyrax and the hare, the Shafan and Arneves in the Hebrew text, do not chew their cud. Yet it seems that we do not know conclusively anymore what the shafan and arneves are, and perhaps they are extinct. Regardless, it is illogical to assume that Moses did not know that the common hare did not chew its cud. It is very conspicuous. Alliteratively, the Torah might be saying that they appear to be chewing their cud, although they actually don't in a conventional way. The fact is that they do regurgitate part of their refuse. (This would fit with the explanation of the Keli Yakar in this essay, that it is the appearance that matters most.) It should be noted, that other animals have one sign and not the other, for example, the llama which, like its cousin the camel, has split hooves and does not chew its cud. The Torah was referring to the camel family, not only to the individual camel. [4] Born in 1550 in Lenczyk, Poland (also known as Luntschitz) and studied under the Maharshal, Rabbi Solomon Luria in Lublin, and subsequently served as Rosh Yeshiva (dean) of the yeshiva in Lvov (Lemberg), Poland. In 1604 he was appointed rabbi of Prague, a position he filled until his death in 1619. In the introduction of his Keli Yakar, he relates that the name Shlomo was added to his name during a life-threatening illness. [5] Kelei Yakar Leviticus 11:4. [6] See Midrash Rabah Bereishis 65:1 (quoted in Rashi Genesis 27:34) why Esau is compared to a pig, who spreads out its hooves to show that it's kosher. In Yiddish there is an expression: "kosher vi a chaser fus," kosher as the foot of the pig, meaning externally moral, and internally rotten. [7] See Yuma 69b. Rashi to Genesis 37:4. Keli Yakar ibid.

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Be'er Moshe

By Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Parshas Shemini

Tough Love

And it was/Vayehi on the eighth day...

Chazal[2] observe that sometimes Scripture uses the word vayehi, and at other times the word vehaya. Both essentially mean "and it was." They

explain that the former introduces unhappy events – like the deaths of Aharon's sons in our pasuk, while the latter leads to more pleasant things. The midrash quickly raises an objection from what seems to be a counterexample: "Vehaya when Yerushalayim was captured." [3] This was hardly an event that inspired celebration.

The midrash answers its own question. Actually, it did provide occasion for joy. That tragic day provided a dispensation to Klal Yisrael for its sins. This idea is echoed in another maamar Chazal, reflecting on a verse in Tehillim.[4] "A mizmor of Asaph. The nations have entered Your inheritance; they have desecrated Your holy Sanctuary." The word mizmor denotes joyous song. It is hardly appropriate for a description of the churban. Kinah/lamentation would be the way to, we would think. Chazal, however, say "no." The churban did give us some measure of joy. It showed the depth of Hashem's love for His people, even while midas hadin was at the height of its expression. Rather than destroy His people, Hashem vented His anger on wood and stone. Having lost its kedushah through the aveiros of Klal Yisrael, the beis hamikdosh had already been reduced to just that – undistinguished sticks and stones. Happily, they absorbed some of the Divine fury, and were destroyed in place of people's lives. Through their destruction, we found dispensation for our sins.

There are several parallels to this. Consider this verse: "As I came to G-d's holy places, I comprehended their fate." [5] The gemara[6] applies this to Ravina and Rav Ashi, who were the "end or hora'ah," i.e. the ones who completed and sealed the legislative process of the Talmud. By this they meant that while overseeing the churban of the second beis hamikdosh, Hashem ensured that there would be talmidei chachamim who would generate a collection of the Torah she-b'al-peh that would sustain our people throughout the long galus. Here as well, Hashem orchestrated the future well-being of His children, even as He found it necessary to punish them. The gemara[7] tells us that R. Avimi was once asked by his father R. Avahu for a glass of water. By the time that R. Avimi returned, R Avahu had nodded off. R Avimi patiently waited for his father to awaken. During the time he waited, he reported, he merited solving the aforementioned "mizmor of Asaf" enigma. Why did this illumination come to him specifically while he waited for his father?

Ulah [8] taught that when the nations of the world heard Hashem intone the dibros of "I am Hashem," and You shall have no other gods before you," they were skeptical. "He's commanding all these laws for His own honor. Once they heard the fifth dibur – "Honor your father and mother" – they reconsidered. G-d commanded that people should own up to the gratitude they ought to feel towards the parents who gave them life and sustained them. That made sense to them. From there, it was a short distance to the realization that Hashem as well was a partner in their creation, and honor was therefore due Him as well.

R. Avimi, waiting for his father to wake up, contemplated this relationship between the mitzvah of honoring parents, and the obligation to honor Hashem for all that He gives us. Precisely then, he understood yet another level of the love that He displays to us – that even at times in which midas hadin reigns, He orchestrates our survival from behind the scenes.

1. Adapted from Be'er Moshe, by the Ozherover Rebbe zt"l ↑ 2. Vayikra Rabbah 11:7 ↑ 3. Yirmiyahu 38:28 ↑ 4. Tehillim 79:1 ↑ 5. Tehillim 73:17 ↑

6. Bava Metzia 86a ↑ 7. Kiddushin 31b ↑ 8. Kiddushin 31a ↑

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Weekly Parsha SHMINI

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The great seven day ceremony of the dedication of the Mishkan has passed. Now, on the eighth day, the actual service and public purpose and use of the Mishkan is to begin. But this day will be marred by the tragedy of the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, the two sons of Aharon.

The eighth day represents the difficulties of life that always follow great and exalting moments and events. The Psalmist asks "Who can climb the

mountain of God?" That itself is a difficult task. But then David raises an even more difficult task: "And who can maintain their place on his holy place?"

After the triumph and euphoria of climbing the mountain, of dedicating the Mishkan, of the marriage ceremony and of the birth date of the child, then the real work of maintaining that exalted feeling begins. It is not coincidental that the circumcision day of a Jewish boy is on the eighth day of his life. The eighth day represents the beginning of the struggles and difficulties, even of the tragedies as we see in this week's parsha. This is what life has in store for every human being.

Those of us who remember the great days in our Jewish national lives – 1948 and the declaration of the state and 1967, the reunification of Jerusalem – know how difficult it is to retain that optimism and faith after long decades of strife, turmoil, disappointment, mistakes and enmity. Yet the key to our survival and success lies in our ability to somehow do so. It is the eighth day that is the true test of human and Jewish mettle.

The Torah also informs us in this week's parsha that God, so to speak, prefers to use holy and faithful people as examples to others of the problems caused by improper behavior. Aharon's sons are seen, in Jewish tradition, as being righteous, dedicated people. Yet it is their deviation, no matter how well intentioned and innovative as it was, from what they had been commanded to do that led to their tragic demise.

The rituals and traditions are not to be tinkered with according to personal ideas, wishes and whims. And, if this is true, as it is for every individual Jew no matter his or her position in life, how much more so is it true for people who are priests in the Temple/Mishkan, leaders of religion and purported role models to the young and the general community at large. The closer one gets, so to speak, to spirituality and Torah greatness, the greater the responsibility for discipline and probity in obedience to the Torah's commandments and values. Deviations and mistakes at that exalted stage of achievement can, as we see in this week's parsha, prove to be lethal.

The rabbis warned wise men, scholars and leaders about speech that is not carefully thought out or actions that are impulsive. The effect upon others can be devastating and negative. The countermeasure of God, so to speak, to prevent this is frightening as the parsha teaches us. We should always be mindful of the eighth day, as reflected in the daily incidents that make up our lives.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

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April 20, 2025

Debunking Antisemitism: The 109 Countries Myth

by Yaakov Best

Antisemitic myths like this one distort the past and fuel hate in the present. Over the past few years, a meme has been going around claiming Jews were kicked out of 109 countries. And since Jews have been expelled from so many countries, the thinking goes, they must have done something really bad to deserve it.

This is a complete fabrication based on distortions of history, rooted in baseless Jew-hatred. Let's break it down by touching on the biggest expulsions of the Jews: England, France, and Spain, as well as a few smaller ones.

Where did this "109 countries" meme come from? This antisemitic trope originated from a Holocaust-denying group in Australia, and has been turned into a meme on social media. Antisemitic accounts on social media will often use this trope as a way of reinforcing the stereotypes they push about Jews as being a bad influence on where they live.

History tells a completely different story if you look at the facts. First of all, the real number of big expulsions from an entire country is much smaller, closer to 12; not even close to 109. Antisemites use smaller-scale expulsions in the same countries to inflate the numbers. These expulsions were often driven by politics, economics and most of all - prejudice for being different.

By claiming that Jews, the victims of the expulsions, deserved it, antisemites turn history on its head.

This slur is also a form of scapegoating, blaming a particular group for the problems of the past, as well as the present.

What really happened in history? Let's look at the facts of these expulsions to uncover the truth.

Expelled from England

In 1290, about 2,000 Jews were expelled from England. In the times leading up to the expulsion, Jews were essentially property of the King of England. The King could tax Jews at will, such as when King Edward I also imposed a poll tax on the Jews to fund his war against Wales. Unlike Christian subjects, Jews were restricted from landownership and many trades. The King could take anything the Jews owned. So King Edward I expelled the Jews after years of taxing them into the ground.

Why? Money and prejudice. Due to the aforementioned ban on Jews entering trades, they were forced into moneylending. When nobles or knights couldn't pay back the Jewish lenders, the King exploited this situation by expelling the Jews and taking over the debts for himself. This wasn't about Jewish "crimes" - it was a royal cash grab wrapped in religious hate.

Expulsion from France

Like England, Jews were greatly restricted in their economic and legal rights. Their status was "servi camerae regis," or servants of the royal chamber. This placed all Jews directly under the King of France's direct authority, a power the King abused often for levying taxes whenever he saw fit. In 1306, King Philip IV, or Philip the Fair expelled around 100,000 Jews. Why? After fighting wars against Flanders and England, France was broke and the King coveted the wealth of the Jews. He used piety as a pretext for his expulsion, claiming that lending on interest was a spiritual bane on the country. Again, like in England, Jews were forced into money lending since their participation in trades was very restricted. He confiscated their property, and canceled debts owed to them before. No evidence was involved in this decision, just scapegoating. These weren't punishments for "bad behavior" - they were power plays by people who saw Jews as easy targets.

Expulsion from Spain

Spanish Grand Inquisitor Tomas de Torquemada had been lobbying the King and Queen for years to expel all of the Jews from Spain, arguing that their very presence was a threat to converts from Judaism to Christianity. The Spanish Monarchs rebuffed him until the Spanish capture of Granada, finishing reconquista of the Iberian Peninsula against the Muslims. This event greatly reduced the economic importance of the Jewish population. Only after their economic use was reduced did King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella issue the Alhambra Decree in 1492, forcing Jews to be expelled or forcibly converted.

Scholars estimate anywhere between 40,000-200,000 Jews were expelled. One Jew was given special permission to stay without converting: Don Isaac Abarbanel, a brilliant Jewish scholar as well as the Spanish Kingdom's Finance Minister. Abarbanel even helped fund the war in Granada. They weren't beyond breaking their own rules to serve their interests. Abarbanel refused, choosing to stay with his Jewish brethren, accompanying them out of Spain.

As with England and France, Spain gained incalculable capital from this expulsion through confiscation, forced asset sales, fines for leaving itself, and debt cancellations. The amount in modern currency could be anywhere between the millions and billions.

This pattern repeated itself over and over again. As a distinct minority, Jews were easy targets for abuse, extortion, and crimes against humanity. Jews were the subject of a pogrom in 1084 in Mainz, Germany, being blamed for fires that burned a big portion of the city. In 1421, the Jews of Vienna were subject to burning at the stake, expulsion and imprisonment on false charges of ritual murder and sacrifice. In 1442, Jews were expelled from Bavaria as a supposedly pious reaction to usury, yet confiscated Jewish wealth and cancelled debts, showing a clear earthly motive for the expulsion.

What ties these expulsions together? The false accusation of crimes, religious intolerance, economic greed, and political scapegoating. The medieval King and Queens of Europe, as well as mobs used Jews as punching bags and pawns to pretend to solve their own problems. There you have it – the “109 countries” myth, debunked. It flips the script of reality, blaming the victims instead of the real culprits. History is complicated but one thing is clear: Antisemitic myths distort the past and fuel hate in the present. That’s why we it’s important to set the record straight.

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date: Apr 8, 2015, 4:05 AM

Rav Kook Torah

Shemini: Immersion in Water

“If any of these dead [animals] falls on a vessel, it will become unclean....

That article must be immersed in a mikveh.” (Lev. 11:32)

The topic of ritual impurity is a difficult one. This impurity is not a tangible quality that may be seen or felt. It is a spiritual contamination, the result of association with death. To purify ourselves from this contamination, we must immerse ourselves in a natural spring or a ritual bath (mikveh) filled with rainwater.

Why Immersion in Water?

The story is told of a wealthy American Jew who decided to visit one of the leading Torah scholars of his generation. Upon arriving at the rabbi’s home, the visitor was shocked to discover that the renowned scholar lived in a simple house, with a dirt floor and shabby wood furnishings. Anxious to help the rabbi improve his living conditions, the guest suggested that it would be more becoming for such an eminent scholar to have more respectable furnishings, and he would be more than happy to pay for all expenses.

The rabbi turned to his guest. “And tell me, where is your furniture?”

“My furniture?” responded the American Jew, baffled. “Why, I am only a visitor here. I don’t travel with all my belongings.”

“So with me,” the rabbi replied. “I am only a visitor here in this world...”

A Lesson in Estrangement

The very act of immersing ourselves in water contains a profound psychological lesson. All immoral deeds, flawed character traits, and erroneous opinions stem from the same fundamental mistake: not recognizing that life in this world is transitory. Here, we are only visitors.

Whatever we find here should be utilized for its eternal value.

When we immerse ourselves in water, we are forced to recognize our existential estrangement from the physical universe. How long can we survive under water? The experience of submerging drives home the realization that our existence in this world is transient, and we should strive towards more lasting goals.

Tents and Natural Springs

The Sages (Berachot 16a) hinted to this insight when they compared the results of Torah study to that of a purifying spring:

“Why did Balaam compare the tents of Israel to streams? This teaches us that just as a spring raises one from impurity to purity, so too, the tents [of Torah learning] raise one from a state of culpability to a state of merit.”

In what way is learning Torah like submerging in a natural spring?

Torah study and immersion in water have a similar beneficial effect. Instead of focusing only on the material matters of this world, learning the wisdom of Torah raises our sights to eternal values and aspirations. For this reason, the Sages used the expression, “tents of Torah.” Why tents? A tent is the most transient of homes. This phrase emphasizes the quality of Torah that, like a purifying mikveh or a natural spring, makes us aware of the transitory nature of the physical world.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 190-191. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 74.)

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 textÖbut 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 Shímini, accessible on our website at torah.org/advanced/mikra) presented here, amid the dedication festivities and attendant tragedy? Why is Aharon singled out to receive only this command (all other commands regarding the special status of Kohanim were given through the familiar formula)?

V. EXCEPTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

WHAT 'BELONGS' IN SEFER VAYIKRA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BETWEEN SHMOT AND VAYIKRA

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

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

THE SEVEN DAY "MILUIUM" CEREMONY

Let's review the primary elements of this ceremony:

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

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

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

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

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

YOM HA'SHMINI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This is precisely what we find:

(1) Due to CHET HA'EGEL:

Aharon must bring a chatat and olah:

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

Bnei Yisrael must also bring a chatat and olah:

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

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

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

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

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

YOM HA'SHMINI / YOM KIPPUR AND SHAVUOT

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

YOM KIPPUR

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

The following table highlights this parallel:

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

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

BNEI YISRAEL

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

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

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

SHAVUOT

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

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

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

NADAV AND AVIHU

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

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

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

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

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

WHY IN SEFER VAYIKRA?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHY SEVEN?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

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

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

1. Relate this to their function as atonement for Chet ha'Egel.
2. Relate this to the machloket Rashi/Ramban concerning when Trumah/Tzaveh was given (before or after Chet haEgel)?
3. How does Aharon's korban on the seven day miluim relate to his korban on Yom Shmini?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PARSHAT TAZRIA / METZORA

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

PART ONE - WHAT DID NADAV & AVIHU DO WRONG?

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

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

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

FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

EMPHASIZING A CRITICAL POINT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE PROBLEM OF 'GOOD INTENTIONS'

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

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

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

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

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

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

NADAV & AVIHU's PUNISHMENT

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

BACK TO SEFER VAYIKRA

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

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

PART II

WHO CAN ENTER THE MISHKAN / TUMAH & TAHARA

INTRODUCTION

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

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

THE UNIT

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

CHAPTER "TUMAH" CAUSED BY:

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

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

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

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

VAYIKRA - CHAPTERS 11 -> 15

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

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

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

FINALE psukim (11:44-47)

[See similar structure in TAZRIA & METZORA]

ZOT TORAT HA'BAYIT etc 10:3!]

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 MIKDAH 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 MIKDAH (see Rambam Sefer Avodah). Obviously, these laws apply only when a Mikdash exists, as there is no other consequence of 'becoming tamey' other than limited entry to areas containing shchinah.

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

E. See 11:44-45

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

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

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

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

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

Parshat Shemini: What is Holiness?

By Rabbi Eitan Mayer

Note: Our 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-kodesh") 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 "mamleket kohanim ve-goy kadosh" -- we are to be a 'kadosh' nation to Hashem, a nation of kohanim to Hashem. A similar theme is picked up by Sefer Devarim, which repeats several times that Hashem chose us as His "am segula," treasured nation, His "am kadosh." (Shemot focuses more on the challenge to us to become holy, whilst Devarim focuses on our being dedicated by Hashem to His service).

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

HASHEM'S HOLINESS:

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

1) Places where the Torah describes Hashem Himself as kadosh. [Note that in almost all of the places where Hashem describes Himself as holy, this is connected to the holiness of Bnei Yisrael through imitatio Dei; in other words, Hashem is usually saying something like, "Be holy because I, your God, am holy."]

2) Places where Hashem demands that people sanctify Him. This should be familiar to us as the concept of "kiddush Hashem." This means somehow adding to the glory of Hashem's reputation among people. In our parasha, when Nadav and Avihu are killed when they bring an unbidden ketoret (incense) offering before Hashem, Moshe tells Aharon that Hashem has told him, "bi-kroavai 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.

KEDUSHA 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.]

KEDUSHA 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 tiyu" 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 tiyu li mamleket kohanim ve-goy kadosh."

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

KASHRUT:

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

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

SEXUAL CRIMES:

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

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

Shabbat Shalom