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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) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

Hersh ben Perel Chana, cousin of very close friends of ours, has been confirmed as one of approximately 240 initial hostages to Hamas in Gaza. The Wall St. Journal featured Hersh and his family in a front page article on October 16. Chabad, OU, and many synagogues recommend psalms (Tehillim) to recite daily for the safety of our people. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully – with the help of Hashem.

Why do bad things happen to good people? This profound question continues to trouble most of us, as it has for thousands of years. Rabbi Ysoscher Katz notes that sometimes the only response to tragic events is silence, as we try to accept personal disaster and move on with life. Rabbi Katz observes that Shemini, especially the consequences of the installation of the Mishkan and Kohenim – the death of Nadav and Avihu (Aharon's sons) – speaks to our people as we try to understand and cope with the tragic attack by Hamas and subsequent explosion of anti-Semitism throughout the world.

Most commentators assume that Nadav and Avihu sin by bringing their fire pans and incense without Hashem's command to do so. Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander, however, reads the Torah as maintaining that the sacrifice of Aharon's two sons seems to be an intended part of the dedication and consecration of the Mishkan. Moshe relates to Aharon, *"I will be sanctified through those who are nearest Me, thus I will be honored before the entire people"* (10:3). Aharon understands that the death of his two sons is part of how Hashem accepts the sanctification of the Mishkan and the kohenim. Aharon accepts this response and is silent – he has no response to Hashem's decision (10:3).

Rabbi Brander also maintains that the words in our parsha speak to all Jews during this time as we continue the fight to destroy Hamas, release our hostages, and end the ability of our enemies to resume attacks on our land from Gaza (and from other neighboring countries). He summarizes that all Jews, especially those in Israel, grieve for the holy lives we have lost in the battle for a dream of a future of a united Israel – and hopefully for a united B'Nai Yisrael – in our future.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, focuses on the questions of how humans can come close to Hashem and how a Kohen serving in the Temple can respond to personal loss when serving as the representative for the community to serve God. Rabbi Sacks brings in Rashi's insight on 10:3, that Nadav and Avihu are more holy than Aharon and Moshe, and that is why Hashem accepts the two sons as korbanot rather than their father and uncle. Again, Aharon has no response to this halachic insight. He must remain silent. Aharon and his remaining sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, do make one adjustment to the death of Nadav and Avihu – they do not participate in the chatat (eating the Kohen's portion of that korban) on the day of the deaths. Moshe tells them that the community will not receive forgiveness for their sins if the kohenim on duty do not eat their share of the chatat. Aharon responds that he believes that God would not expect them to eat from the korban on the day that two members of their immediate family have died. Moshe accepts Aharon's response. Rabbi

Sacks concludes that there is some (limited) room to modify halacha for private feelings for a kohen representing the community during service in the Mishkan (or Mikdash) under extreme situations, but the scope for any such change must be very limited and rare.

Rabbi David Fohrman and his scholars at Alephbeta.org discuss parallels to the dedication of the Mishkan in Bereishis (the sin of eating from God's special Tree, of Knowledge) and numerous parallels in Megillat Esther (Purim). I have discussed these parallels in previous years (5781 and 5782), and the discussion is available in my archives for Shemini at PotomacTorah.org. Our tradition holds that the vessels that King Achashverosh use for his banquets come from the Temple in Jerusalem, and the historic context of the Purim story is that it is at the time that Ezra, Nechemia, Chagai, and Zecharia are building the second Temple. One of the ironic twists in the Purim story is that Mordechai is mocking the Jews in Persia for participating in King Achashverosh's lavish non-Kosher banquets, using vessels that belong in the Temple, when they should be in Jerusalem participating in the dedication of the second Temple. Nadav and Avihu bring a non-authorized offering to the dedication and die. In contrast, Esther tells Mordechai that she will be killed if she goes to see the king (a symbol for God in the Megillah) without him calling her first. Esther must find a way around the death edict to be able to visit the king safely, something that neither Nadav nor Avihu consider. These brief examples give a flavor of Rabbi Fohrman's insights on parallels between Shemini and other parts of Tanach. Commentaries below bring the parallels to later Jewish history – the Holocaust (Rabbi Sacks) and events of the past six months (Rabbis Brander and Katz).

My beloved Rabbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, had a special talent for finding parallels between the weekly parsha and current events. He gave me a joy in searching for connections between the Torah and events elsewhere in Tanach and life. Hopefully our children and grandchildren will find some of this pleasure as they continue their education.

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 Shlemah for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (wounded in battle in Gaza), Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, 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

Parshat Shemini: "I Will Be Sanctified Through Those Near To Me"

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth Brander (5784 / 2024)
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone

The untimely death of Nadav and Avihu, the two sons of Aharon devoured by a heavenly fire after offering a sacrifice upon the *mizbeiach*, the altar, on the day of the Mishkan's inauguration, has long been seen as an enigma. With no reason
given for their death, the classical Rabbinic commentators are left to puzzle over the handful of clues offered by the Torah that might provide the cause for the taking of their lives.

Yet I have always been drawn to the position that Nadav and Avihu didn't sin at all, and that none of the transgressions suggested would have been grievous enough to justify a punishment as grave as death. Rather, as emerges from the words of the Midrash)Sifra, Shmini I:23(, the actions of Nadav and Avihu as well as their death all play a role in the dedication and consecration of the Mishkan.

Moses said to Aaron: *"My brother, I knew that this House was to be sanctified by those who are beloved of God and I thought it would be either through me or through you; now I see that it has been sanctified through Nadav and Avihu – they are greater than me and you"*)Rashi, Vayikra 10:3(

"*Vayidom Aharon*" – Aharon falls silent. He accepts the price his family needs to pay in the dedication of a House of God in this world. The wordדום *)dom(* does not merely connote silence)usually reflected in the word שתיקה, *shtika*(, but rather a tranquility of spirit, a realization and acceptance of the role he and his children must play in the unfolding narrative of the Torah.

The words of Moshe, אקדש בקרובי, *"I will be sanctified through krovim, those near to me,"* ring especially true during these times as young and not so young, religious and secular, Israelis of every walk of life are snatched away from us in these long, heavy, tragic months.

The active partnership and participation of the *krovim*, those righteous and beloved by God, helped consecrate God's presence in the Mishkan and, painfully, now help consecrate God's presence in the House of God's larger embodiment: Medinat Yisrael. Like Aharon, their painful absence leaves us silenced but hopeful that the Divine plan will lead from the losses we have experienced to a better, holier future for our people and our state.

Families throughout Israel – in every community, in every classroom, in every synagogue – contain the heroic and courageous likes of Aharon. Even in the face of immeasurable loss, these parents, spouses, siblings, children, and friends continue as Aharon did; to carry on, finding the courage to keep their lives afloat in the absence of their loved ones. Listen to their words at funerals, shiva homes, and memorial services. Their courage defies description, and their commitment to the posture of "*Vayidom Aharon*" – falling silent, with allegiance to the mission of Medinat Yisrael – has given new meaning to these words. This seems to be the way our immortality is guaranteed, through the sacrifice of God's most beloved.

Standing at one military funeral after another, I am reminded of a teaching from Rabbi Soloveitchik, who once addressed his view of the Israeli flag. Does the object of the flag have any religious status or sanctity? While at face value, there is no halakhic status afforded to any flag, Rabbi Soloveitchik points to the rule that the clothing of a Jew murdered *al kiddush hashem*, for the sanctity of God, must be buried along with the person – a *halakha* that has taken on entirely new dimensions in the aftermath of Oct. 7, with clothing, bedsheets, and even entire cars being included in this observance. With this in mind, Rabbi Soloveitchik offers a striking perspective on the Israeli flag:

> *If you ask me, how do I, a Talmudic Jew, look upon the flag of the State of Israel, and has it any halachic value? – I would answer plainly. I do not hold at all with the magical attraction of a flag or of similar symbolic ceremonies. Judaism negates ritual connected with physical things.*

Nonetheless, we must not lose sight of a law in the Shulchan Aruch to the effect that: "One who has been killed by non-Jews is buried in his clothes, so that his blood may be seen and avenged …"

How much more is this so of the blue and white flag, which has been immersed in the blood of thousands of young Jews who fell in the War of Independence defending the country and the population)Religious and non-religious because the enemy knows no difference(. It has a spark of sanctity that flows from devotion and self-sacrifice.)Rabbi Soloveitchik, *Five Addresses,* p.139(.

The flag reflects our sense of shared purpose and mission, which brings with it our shared feelings of loss for those who have been taken from us on our journey towards protecting our State and the future of our people. Together, we grieve for the holy lives taken from us and dream for the future of our people united in purpose and peace.

* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

Last Shabbat)March 16(, thugs used a firebomb to set the Chabad center of Las Olas)Ft. Lauderdale(in Southern Florida on fire. The Chabad centers in the area have sent an appeal for support so the Las Olas Chabad can rebuild and continue to serve Jews in its region. For more information, https://jewishfl.org/

Shemini: To Do and Do and Do as Commanded

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5770 (2010)

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(

What was alien about it? That HASHEM had not Commanded them.)Ohr HaChaim(

The entire Jewish Nation was as the height of celebration! In the midst of the inauguration of the Tabernacle a terrible tragedy occurred. The two sons of Aaron were stricken by a heavenly fire. What terrible thing had Nadav and Avihu done that they were worthy of dying? They brought an offering to HASHEM! They wanted to draw close to HASHEM. King David himself had declared)Tehillim73:28(, *"What's good for me is being close to HASHEM."* That's his personal definition of *"goodness."* Certainly there is nothing wrong with that! Rav Kook had written)Orot 135(, *"Closenes to G-d is the strongest natural desire in man…This desire drives man to seek to know and be…"* What then had they done so wrong?

The Sefas Emes writes the following in the name of his grandfather the Chidushei Harim:

"You can learn from this that the main part of the doing of a Mitzvah comes from power of the Commandment within it. Nadav and Avihu were spiritual giants of the world, and their intentions were based on the deepest secrets of unification. Even still, because they were not commanded to do so they were punished. How much more so can the positive be inferred that if one does a Mitzvah, fulfilling the Commandment of The Creator, even though he does not have such deep intentions is he worthy of life…The main thing is to do the Mitzvos of The Holy One Blessed is He and this comes to include even the simplest of people…"

This past week in the midst of the intermediate days of Pesach I received a call late in the evening to come and greet and give a tour of Yeshivas Ohr Somayach to a Jew that was visiting for the day from out of town. Within just a few minutes of the phone call I stood eye ball to eye ball with someone of whom I could say I was truly jealous. A simple middle aged

Russia Jew who has been living in Tennessee for the past twenty years had an impulse to do what had not been done for him in his youth. He flew alone to New York and then trekked all the way up to Monsey to submit himself to a Bris Mila - - circumcision and as a bonus he also had his *"Pidyan HaBen."*

That whole day he was the center-piece of celebration and welcoming by the Jewish community the likes of which he had never experienced. He was overwhelmed and was beaming with a deep and sublime joy. He humbly expressed his gratitude and repeatedly testified at how different and special he felt. With reverence and wonderment he toyed with pronouncing his new Jewish name *"Michoel"* as a child would tinker with an authentic police badge. He hardly knew why he had done what he had done, which cost him the price of a plane flight and twenty-two stitches, but he did it. Now that it was done, I believe he understood that he possessed something that no one could ever take away from him.

There is an aphorism which helps me to justify why I do not do any electrical work around the house other than change the occasional light bulb, *"Fools rush in where angels fear to tread!"* Nadav and Avihu were no fools but they did rush into a place where angels fear to tread and were burnt. This simple fellow did as he was commanded, albeit without grandiose spiritual intentions, and tasted the taste of life. The Torah is that rich menu of opportunities and cautioning **to do and do and do as Commanded.**

Good Shabbos!

https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5770-shemini/

Shemini – The Rosh Yeshiva Responds – Havdalah: Before Tzeit/Lost Sense of Smell

by Rabbi Dov Linzer
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

> *for you must distinguish between the sacred and the profane, and between the impure and the pure;* (Vayikra 10:10).

QUESTION — Neew England, USA

For many of my families, daylight savings time means that Havdalah will be later than their kids bed time. On one hand doing it Sunday morning seems halakhically fine but experientially strange. Could one do Havdalah without a candle and without Sheim HaShem before bed time so kids feel like Shabbat is ending?

ANSWER

Yes. See *Shulchan Arukh* OC 293:3. One can make Havdalah (without candle) from Plag on, when necessary. You won't be saying the borei meorei ha'eish berakhah, obviously, and all other berakhot will be said normally. I do this regularly, since I wait 72 minutes for Shabbat to be over, and my family doesn't, so I often make Havdalah when Shabbat is over for them, even if it isn't over for me. Obviously, one has to wait until Tzeit to be allowed to do melakhah. Saying from Plag on just fulfills the mitzvah of Havdalah.

Lost Sense of Smell and Borei Minei Besamim

QUESTION— Brooklyn, NY

If someone lost their sense of smell from Covid related symptoms are they allowed to say borei minei besamim? What should they do if saying the Havdalah for others in their household?

ANSWER

No. My sense of smell — unrelated to COVID — has become quite poor, and I have someone else (my wife) make the berakhah. Even according to those opinions — which I don't pasken like — that women are patur from Havdalah, this isn't Havdalah (which is the final berakhah), it's just a birkat ha'nehenim over spices. If no one is available to make the berakhah, you just skip it — Shulchan Arukh OC 297:1

* President and Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY.

YCT invites readers to a Pre-Pesach Learning on Zoom, Free & Open to the Public, Sunday, April 7th, 8-10 p.m., Eastern Time. For information, yctorah.org.

https://library.yctorah.org/2024/04/ryrshemini/

Noach – The Rosh Yeshiva Responds – Reciting a Blessing on Seeing a Solar Eclipse

by Rabbi Dov Linzer
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

"While the earth remains…day and night will not cease." (Gen. 8:22)

QUESTION

On October 14, an annular solar eclipse crossed the sky from Oregon to Texas. On April 8, 2024, a total solar eclipse will be visible from Texas to Maine. Does a person recite a blessing on witnessing a solar eclipse?

ANSWER

In Brakhot (59a), the Rabbis established that a blessing should be recited upon experiencing thunder, lightning, an earthquake, a shooting star and powerful winds. As a matter of halakha, with the exception of hearing thunder, we recite the blessing *oseh ma'aseh bereishit* ("Who makes the works of creation") over these phenomena (SA OH 227-228).

What about reciting a blessing over phenomena that are not mentioned explicitly by the Rabbis, such as waterfall, a geyser, or an active volcano? R. Chaim David Ha'Levi, R. David Lau, and R. Chaim Kanyevsky are all opposed to doing so, and particularly in the case of a solar eclipse, since the gemara in Sukkah (29a) states that a solar eclipse is a bad omen for the world. However, aggadic statements carry little halakhic weight, and this argument is clearly contradicted by the fact that a blessing is recited over an earthquake, a profoundly negative and destructive phenomenon.

The argument not to recite a brakhah on an eclipse rests primarily on the fact that it is not mentioned explicitly in the Talmud or Shulkhan Arukh. But there is no reason to think that the Talmud's list is exhaustive, and many poskim argue that it is not. These include: R. Nissim Karlitz, R. Shmuel Vozner and R. Eliezer Melamed.

On one level, this debate is a technical one. It seems to me, though, that there is something deeper at play here; should we maximize opportunities to make brakhot when possible within halakhah, or should we adopt a more conservative, cautious approach out of concern for brakhah li'vatalah (a blessing in vain) and brakhah she'einah tzrikhah (a blessing that is superfluous). This can be framed, as R. Yoel bin Nun has described it, as a question of whether to give primacy to ahavat Hashem or yirat Hashem.

In addition to that tension, we need to ask: What does it mean when our religious impulse to praise God and see God in the world is not able to find expression in halakhic forms, such as the recitation of brakhot? Does this not run the risk of making brakhot and tefillah purely a matter of rule-following and not a vehicle to express our gratitude and connection to God?

In any given case, the halakhic issues have to be weighed carefully, and any psak has to be rigorously argued. Sometimes, there will be a serious doubt as to whether a brakhah should be made and the principle of ספק ברכות להקל will

dictate. Other times, the more persuasive argument may be that a brakhah should be made. In these latter cases, it is my position that we should recite a brakhah and bring our religious and halakhic lives more fully in sync. And when it comes to making a brakha on a solar eclipse, the argument that one should make the brakha is, in my opinion, the far more persuasive one.

If you merit to see a solar eclipse, you should give religious and halakhic expression to our sense of wonder when contemplating God's glorious creation and recite the brakha of oseh ma'aseh bereishit. Truly, mah rabu ma'asekha Hashem!

https://library.yctorah.org/2023/10/noach-the-rosh-yeshiva-responds-reciting-a-blessing-on-seeing-a-solar-eclipse/

Shemini: The Perfect Parasha for these Challenging Times

By Rabbi Ysoscher Katz *

If you go to shul this weekend, listen to the Torah reading, and are left with an eerie feeling, you will be in good company.

Furthermore, if you didn't know otherwise, you'd be excused for thinking that this week's Torah portion was written by a contemporary theologian sometime after October seventh.

While a lot happens in this week's parasha (it always does), the main theme is Job'esque. Like the book of Job, it too tells a tale that forces us to grapple with the theodicy question *("Why do bad things happen to good people?"),* a question that has recently been weighing heavily on the minds of many of us.

Ever since the "dark Shabbat" last Simchat Torah, when Hamas terrorists brutally murdered more than one thousand Israelis, burned down several kibbutzim, and took more than two hundred hostages, many of us have been asking the theodicy question. We have been wondering: how does the believing person make theological sense of these atrocities? How could such evil befall so many innocent people? What explains the lack of intervention by a God Who we believe is kind, just, and benevolent? Why didn't God thwart the evil?

All of these are hard questions that tug at our hearts and weigh heavily on our minds.

Sadly, though, we are not the first Jews to be baffled by this theological conundrum. Because of our persecution-pocked history, we have had to confront this issue time and again, resulting in a variety of possible answers to these vexing questions.

While there indeed are multiple suggested solutions, this week's Torah portion's "solution" is unique for two reasons: a) it is the FIRST time a Torah text addresses the issue up front, and b) its solution is unique: it addresses the challenge and helps us grapple with it, but it does not attempt to resolve it.

Here are the details.

On the happiest day of his life, the day he is inaugurated as the first high-priest to serve in the Beit Hamikdash, Aaron sees his sons die violently and prematurely. A heavenly fire consumes them. The emotional pain is compounded by the unbearable spiritual shock. The horror seems theologically indefensible.

Moshe attempts to resolve the theological dissonance by offering an explanation/justification for what occurred, but that boomerangs. Instead of engaging his brother, Aaron goes silent. As the Torah describes it, sparsely but emphatically, Aaron reacted to his brother with utter silence!

Aaron's roaring silence seems to be a loud and bold refutation of Moses's attempt to solve the theological challenge. One does not "make sense" of divine caprice,^* Aaron seems to suggest. That would be theologically obscene. Instead of

explaining why it happened, we suspend logic, cease talking, and silently embrace the only thing left for us after being spiritually and emotionally defeated. We offer to God our subservient capitulation.

This quietist stance might be the only option for the contemporary observant person when confronted with moments of unbearable religious dissonance, born as a result of encounters that are incompatible with our ethical compass and moral intuition. We neither justify the tragedy nor try to explain it. Instead, we embrace radical silence.

The reaction to tragedy, Aaron teaches us, is not logical; as a matter of fact, it is not even verbal. Sometimes the loudest and most articulate response to loss and devastation is to refrain from speech, since silence means so many more things than words. Speech is uni-vocal while silence is multi-vocal. When we express ourselves with words, we merely say that which we say; in silence we say multiple things simultaneously.

When we are silent we are:
sad;
angry;
despondent;
anticipatory:
depressed;
humble;
scared;
resigned;
hopeful;
Tranquil;
discombobulated;
and more and more!

Consequently, if you are left feeling that this week's Torah portion has eerie contemporary resonance, you are absolutely right. Perhaps down the road there will come a time when "answers" to the troubling theological questions born as a result of the tragic events of October seventh will be forthcoming. For now, though, it would seem that the Aaron model is the most resonant one. At the moment, the best we can do is to indulge in a loud and deeply felt Aaron'esque roaring silence.

Shabbat shalom!

^* I of course am using "caprice" descriptively, not, chas ve'shalom, judgmentally.

***** Rabbi of the Prospect Heights Shul in Brooklyn, New York

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https://library.yctorah.org/2024/04/shemini5784/

Blessings: Thoughts for Parashat Shemini

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

"And Aaron lifted up his hand towards the people and blessed them…" (Vayikra 9:22).

One of the beautiful age-old Jewish traditions is for parents and grandparents to bless their children and grandchildren, generally on Shabbat and holidays. This is a loving way to share their hopes and to invoke God's blessings on their progeny.

The Torah reports blessings that Jacob gave to his children and grandchildren as well as blessings that Moses offered to the tribes of Israel. Aaron blessed the people during the ceremony dedicating the Mishkan. The Torah assigned cohanim the ongoing obligation of blessing the community, a practice that continues to this day.

But what is the meaning of berakha, the Hebrew word for blessing? When we offer someone a blessing, what are we actually conveying?

A berakha reflects a desire to invoke God's blessing since God is the source of all blessing. As a paradigm, the priestly blessing is uttered by the cohanim but the Torah specifies that *"Va-ani Avarekhem,"* and I [God] will bless them. So although human beings verbalize blessings, these are expressions of our hope that God will fulfill them. [emphasis added]

This is true of our blessings to others, but how are we to understand blessings we recite to God? We have berakhot whenever we eat, fulfill a mitzvah, and on many other occasions. Since God is the source of all blessing, what does it mean when we say barukh to God?

The word barukh is connected to the word berekh, knee. When we *"bless"* God, we are actually saying: we bend our knees to You, we are dependent on You, we recognize Your sovereignty. Instead of translating the opening of a berakha as "blessed are You," the translation should be *"we bend our knees to You"* or *"we acknowledge You as the Source of all blessing."*

When we bless children, grandchildren or anyone else, we are praying that the Almighty will bless them accordingly. Offering blessings is an expression of love, respect and hope. Those receiving blessings absorb the positive feelings and intentions of those expressing the blessings.

There is an old Jewish tradition of saying 100 blessings each day as an expression of gratitude to the Almighty and an acknowledgement of our dependence on God. It would be well if we would extend this idea to offering blessings to our fellow human beings. The world would be a happier place if we could bless not just those who are closest to us but all those who act righteously and courageously. While curses deepen enmity among people, blessings promote love and mutual respect.
One who blesses is worthy of the blessings of the Almighty.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals during its current fund raising period. Thank you.

https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3213

Israel Should Offer its Own Peace Plan

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

An Israeli Peace Plan?

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

(This op ed appears in the Jerusalem Post, March 25, 2024)

As Israel is in the midst of a bitter war, it is difficult to be thinking about a peace plan. The government of Israel is adamantly opposed to the American push for a Palestinian State. This is seen as a reward for terrorism and a betrayal of the principle of direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

Agreed.

But the status quo is obviously not satisfactory, not for Israel and not for the Palestinians. Much of the world, even those countries most friendly to Israel, want to see an end to the endless conflicts in the region. The longer the war goes, the greater is the world's pressure to recognize a Palestinian State.

What if Israel came forth with a realistic peace plan of its own? What if Israel would not only agree to a Palestinian State but would be the first to recognize it? What if Israel, instead of constantly being seen as an obstruction to peace, was actually the foremost promoter of a peace plan?

The precondition of such a plan would be that Israel will only negotiate with Palestinian leadership that fully recognizes Israel's right to exist; that commits itself to maintaining peaceful relations with Israel; that makes a concerted effort to eliminate anti-Israel and anti-Jewish propaganda, educational material. In short, Israel should very much want a peaceful neighbor free of Hamas and Hamas-like ideologies.

If the United States and its Arab allies could find and encourage such a Palestinian leadership, this would be a great blessing to Israel and the Palestinians. If Israel would produce a peace plan that would put the onus on Palestinians to agree to peace, this would be a dramatic step forward.

We pray that Israel's current war with Hamas will end with as great a victory as possible for Israel. The victory must be not only military, but also political and diplomatic. The amazing courage and sacrifices of Tsahal are awe-inspiring. Their victory on the battlefield should be followed by victories for Israel in the areas of diplomacy and politics.

Yes, it seems highly unrealistic to find a congenial Palestinian leadership able and willing to negotiate seriously with Israel. It also seems highly unrealistic for the current Israeli government even to consider a peace gesture. But moving forward will require visionary and courageous leadership. It is easy to dismiss peace talk as being in the realm of fantasy. David Ben Gurion is reported to have told his advisors*: "We don't need experts to tell us it's impossible; we need experts to tell us how to achieve the impossible."* Israel has always been able to achieve the impossible in the past: it can strive to do so now.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

Shemini: Birchas Kohanim – Do You Hear the Blessing?

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

Mazal Tov to Rabbi Mordechai and Yittie Rhine on the birth of a grandson to Nechemya and Sori Linzer

On the day that the Mishkan was inaugurated, a featured moment was when Ahron, as Kohein, blessed the people (9:22). Rashi explains that Aharon used the famous text that is recorded in Parshas Naso (Bamidbar 6:22-27), known to us as Birchas Kohanim. In this blessing the Kohein is seen as a messenger of Hashem. *"Place My name upon the people, and I will bless them."* Indeed, our tradition speaks of the Shechina, Hashem's Divine presence, resting upon the hands of the Kohanim as they bless the people. We are forbidden to look at the Kohanim's hands during the blessing, and the Kohanim actually try to cover their hands with a Talis in a way that neither they nor the congregation can see their hands. *(Shulchan Aruch,* OCh 128:23)

The Kohein has many roles in Jewish life. In addition to his serving in the Beis HaMikdash, the Kohein is a teacher and an authority. As described in this week's Parsha (10:11), their role is, *"To teach the Children of Israel all the decrees that were spoken to them through Moshe."* Although no one tribe had a monopoly of Jewish leadership, some of the most outspoken and passionate leaders, such as Eliyahu, Zecharya ben Yehoyada, and Yirmiya, came from the ranks of the Kohanim. The Kohanim were designated as teachers and religious guides both nationally and personally. In the Beis HaMikdash they were the ones who would mentor a person who came with a Korban to do Teshuva or just come closer to Hashem. In the general flow of the nation, they were the ones who would speak up if they felt a leader or the nation were off target.

It seems to me that these two tasks — blessing the people and being religious leaders — are tasks that are linked with one another.

I once had the opportunity to observe a veteran eighth grade Rebbe during the second week of school. The class was reasonably attentive when suddenly a student burst in late to class. The Rebbe stopped him and instructed him, as per school protocol, to get a late note from the principal. The boy lashed back at him with a burst of inappropriate language. Watching all this from the back of the classroom, I thought that now, for sure, the boy was headed to the principal's office. But instead, the Rebbe softened and said, *"Binyomin, please step outside the class and wait for me. You do not need to go to the principal's office; you do not need to get a late note."*

During the course of class, the Rebbe indeed stepped out of the classroom for quite a few minutes and chatted with the student. A bit later, after the Rebbe returned, the student walked in calmly and headed quietly to his seat. I wondered about the incident and later had the opportunity to ask the Rebbe about it.

He explained:

> *"It is still the first weeks of the school year. The boys don't yet know that I am here for them. They think it is me against them. They have not yet seen me advocate for them in difficult situations with their parents, and with the administration. They have not yet seen me help them reconcile differences between each other. Right now, I need to spend the extra few minutes so that they know I am not against them. After they see me in a positive light, I could easily send a boy to the principal for discipline. Then will know that it is not out of anger or spite, because by then we will have established a relationship."*

I think a reason that Hashem chose to give His blessing to the people through the Kohanim is to establish their role as a source of blessing, so that the people should accept discipline from them. The Kohanim were to administrate the most amazing three verse blessing of Birchas Kohanim, encompassing the gamut of physical and spiritual blessings and the fusion of the two. They were to do this, as they declare in the Bracha preceding Birchas Kohanim: B'Ahava – with love. Once the people feel the love and blessing from the Kohanim, once we know that the Kohanim really want us to succeed, it is much easier to receive their discipline. We know that they are not putting us down with their criticism. Rather they are trying to raise us up with blessing, with caring, with discipline and with love.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

* 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.**

Parshas 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.

* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

Shemini

by Rabbi Herzl Hefter *****

]Rabbi Hefter did not send a new Dvar Torah for Shemini. Watch this space for further insights from Rabbi Hefter in future weeks.[

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

Shemini – Parasha Pointers

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia * © 2024

The inauguration of the Mishkan took eight days]Lev. 9:1[. It is interesting to consider the appearances of cycles of seven and eight in the biblical calendar and in events and rituals.

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.

The number eight appears in: Berit Milah, the inauguration of the Mishkan, Shemini Atzeret, and the purification process of the leper.

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.

This also explains why the warning against serving in the Mishkan while drunk is followed by this description of the Kohen's role: 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.

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.

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 from this that even when the program is created by God, there is room for last-minute changes made by people on the ground.

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.

* Torah VeAhava. Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria.** The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Dvar Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia, who has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright rights to this material.

Dom Dum Da Dumb

By Rabbi Moshe Rube * **

This week, our KI family wishes farewell to the Elgavishes, a family that has been here]Birmingham,. AL[for 40 years!

There are so many sentiments I could express that would cause our eyes to fill up with nostalgia, but I shall just mention one.

As we all know, Gabi has a desire to use words in consonance with their origins and has corrected me on many a time for expounding a word in a way that departs from its actual meaning.)Rabbis can never get too creative with wordplay.(

So I will do that now in their honor.

The word "Dum" in Hebrew usually refers to blood, hence the first plague. In our Torah portion though, it's used as a term for silence. When Aharon learns that two of his sons, Nadav and Avihu, had been burnt in the Tabernacle for bringing an uncommanded fire, the Torah says "VayiDom Aharon" – "and Aaron was silent."

So now we see the source for the English word "dumb" which refers to the inability to speak. Aaron in this case was dumbfounded. That's the origin of the English word and I'm sticking to it.

But why was Aaron struck dumb? Do people not express vocal sadness when they lose a loved one? When a Kohen is pricked does he not bleed?

Maybe Aaron wanted to cry out but there was something especially unnerving about this death. It happened at a time of great triumph. A time where Aaron and his family would be inaugurated forever into the priesthood. A time where we presume God would show special favor to him and his family.

But no favor came.

It was this shattered expectation that struck Aaron dumb and this expectation shattering was the entire point of the whole affair.

The Midrash, when zooming in to the sin of Nadav and Avihu, see their problem as shirking the authority of their teacher Moshe by offering a strange fire. If we just stayed with this focus, the story would teach us about our obligation to respect authority.

But if we zoom out, we see the opposite sentiment that authority is not infallible. No matter how holy the leader, no matter how distinguished their pedigree, no matter how great their connection to God, they are but humans. Humans like you and me and subject to the same dictates that we all are.

Not only that but according to the Talmud they are held to even higher standards. For good reason as well. As David Graeber and David Wengrow point out in their book *The Dawn of Everything,* some ancient Mexican cultures had the practice of dragging a newly elected politician through the streets as a way of reminding him whom he serves. To show that he is not above the people though he occupies a special position.

In the same way, this incident illustrated to Aaron and his descendants in a most graphic way that his spiritual responsibilities do not exalt him over the regular Jew. And no abuse of his power to do anything uncommanded could happen.

This idea that we should not see priests or leaders as gods not to be questioned but as humans in a position was a new and subversive idea in the Ancient Near East. To some degree, it still is in our modern world, because every day we must have respect for our authorities, rabbis, and teachers)both living and dead(while also pointing out gaps in their knowledge and know that they are and were human with all the beautiful frailties and imperfections that come with that.

And that pleasure of being corrected for my knowledge gaps is just one reason why I will miss the Elgavishes. I suppose I will have to read more books on linguistics now.

Shabbat Shalom,

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel)Birmingham, AL(.

** I did not receive a new Dvar Torah from Rabbi Rube this week, so I am reprinting his Dvar Torah from 2022.

Rav Kook Torah
Shemini: The Error of Nadav and Avihu

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

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

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

Chochmah and Binah

The Kabbalists explained that Nadav and Avihu erred by separating the spiritual realm of binah)insight(from the higher realm of chochmah)wisdom(. To understand this statement, we must first clarify the concepts of chochmah and binah. Chochmah is the very essence of holiness. It is pure awareness, a flash of intuitive understanding. This lofty perception contains the splendor of sublime ideals at their highest level, before they are applied to the detailed characteristics of reality. Compared to the infinite expanse of chochmah, all else is small and inconsequential.

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

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

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

Separating Binah from Chochmah

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

By doing so, they abandoned the higher source of light that transcends all spiritual freedom and joy. The true basis of life is rooted in the supernal realm of chochmah and Torah. Unpunished, their mistake would have brought about the collapse of the world’s moral foundations. History is testimony to movements dedicated to great ideals that, because they were not anchored to the elevated source of chochmah, descended into the darkest depths of ignorance and cruelty.1

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

Repairing the Mistake of Nadav and Avihu

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

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

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

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

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

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

https://ravkooktorah.org/SHMINI64.htm

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

Shemini: Between Hope and Humanity)5769, 5779(

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is as if Moses said to Aaron: *"My brother, do not give up now. We have come so far. We have climbed so high. I know your heart is broken. So is mine. Did we not think – you and I – that our troubles were behind us, that after all we suffered in Egypt, and at the Red Sea, and in the battle against Amalek, and in the sin of the Golden Calf, we were finally safe and free? And now this has happened. Aaron, don't give up, don't lose faith, don't despair. Your children died not because*

they were evil but because they were holy. Though their act was wrong, their intentions were good. They merely tried too hard." But despite Moses' words of consolation, *"Aaron remained silent,"* lost in a grief too deep for words.

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

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

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

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

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

Around the Shabbat Table:

]1[Were the words of Moses to Aaron)upon the death of his sons(inappropriate? If not, was Aaron wrong to ignore them?

]2[Is it fair to expect Aaron to ignore his pain and continue to perform his role as a spiritual leader for the people?

]3[What are the two examples of courage found in the parsha? Which do you think shows more strength?

]4[Where can the message of the bravery of Aaron and Moses be seen in recent Jewish history?

]5[According to Rabbi Sacks, what can be found in "the two hemispheres of the human brain" and in whom are these embodied in the parsha?

https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/shemini/between-hope-and-humanity/ Footnotes are not available for this Dvar Torah. Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail or saved in my archives at PotomacTorah.org, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

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

By Yehoshua B. Gordon, z"l * © Chabad 2024

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.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6378895/jewish/The-Amazing-Number-Eight.htm

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Shemini: What Is True Closeness?

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

True Closeness

> *Moses spoke to Aaron and his surviving sons, Eleazarand Itamar: "Take the grain-offering left over from G-d's fire-offerings and eat it as unleavened loaves near the Altar, for they are of superior holiness."*)Lev. 10:12(

Moses comforted Aaron over the loss of his two older sons, Nadav and Avihu, by pointing out that their death through Divine ecstasy showed that they were closer to G-d than Moses or Aaron were. Moses was not exaggerating in order to comfort Aaron; on the other hand, he was also aware that Nadav and Avihu had not been privileged to communicate with G-d directly, as he had.

What Moses meant, rather, was that whereas G-d had commanded him)and Aaron(to forego their personal, exalted spiritual state in order to lead the people and teach them the Torah, G-d had made no such demands on Nadav and Avihu. Therefore, they indeed remained *"closer"* to G-d than Moses or Aaron were able to be.

Nonetheless, G-d subsequently made it clear that Nadav and Avihu's approach was not meant to be a model for others. True closeness to G-d results from identifying with His purpose in creating the world: refining it and transforming it into His home, and inspiring and instructing others to do the same

— from *Daily Wisdom 3*

May G-d grant a decisive victory over our enemies.

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

* Insights from the Rebbe.

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(Hinda Rivka bas Chaim) whose yahrzeit is 4 Nisan

Volume 30, Issue 26 **Shabbat Parashat Shemini - HaChodesh** **5784 B"H**

Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Dangers of Enthusiasm

Excavating the history of words can sometimes be as revealing as excavating the ruins of an ancient city. Take the English word "enthusiasm". Today we see this as something positive. One dictionary defines it as "a feeling of energetic interest in a particular subject or activity and an eagerness to be involved in it." People with enthusiasm have passion, zest and excitement, and this can be contagious. It is one of the gifts of a great teacher or leader. People follow people of passion. If you want to influence others, cultivate enthusiasm.

But the word did not always have a favourable connotation. Originally it referred to someone possessed by a spirit or demon. In the seventeenth century England, it came to refer to extreme and revolutionary Protestant sects, and more generally to the Puritans who fought the English Civil War. It became a synonym for religious extremism, zealotry and fanaticism. It was looked on as irrational, volatile and dangerous.

David Hume (1711-1776), the Scottish philosopher, wrote a fascinating essay on the subject.[1] He begins by noting that "the corruption of the best things produces the worst", and that is especially true of religion. There are, he says, two ways in which religion can go wrong: through superstition, and through enthusiasm. These are quite different phenomena.

Superstition is driven by ignorance and fear. We can sometimes have irrational anxieties and terrors, and we deal with them by resorting to equally irrational remedies. Enthusiasm is the opposite. It is the result of over-confidence. The enthusiast, in a state of high religious rapture, comes to believe that he is being inspired by God himself, and is thus empowered to disregard reason and restraint.

Enthusiasm "thinks itself sufficiently qualified to approach the Divinity, without any human mediator." The person in its grip is so full of what he takes to be holy rapture that he feels able to override the rules by which priestly conduct is normally governed. "The fanatic consecrates himself and bestows on his own person a sacred character, much superior to what forms and ceremonious institutions can confer on any other." Rules and regulations, thinks the enthusiast, are for ordinary people, not for us. We, inspired by God, know better. That, said Hume, can be very dangerous indeed.

We now have a precise description of the sin for which Nadav and Avihu, the two elder sons of Aaron, died. Clearly the Torah regards their death as highly significant because it refers to it on no less than four occasions (Lev. 10:1-2, 16:1, Num. 3:4, 26:61). It was a shocking tragedy, occurring as it did on the day of the inauguration of the service of the Mishkan, a moment that should have been one of the great celebrations in Jewish history.

The Sages themselves were puzzled by the episode. The text itself merely says that "they offered unauthorised fire [esh zarah] before the Lord, that He had not commanded. So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord." Evidently the Sages felt that there must have been something else, some further sin or character flaw, to justify so dire and drastic a punishment.

Putting together clues in the biblical text, some speculated that they were guilty of entering the Holy of Holies[2]; that they had given a ruling of their own accord without consulting Moses or Aaron; that they had become intoxicated; that they were not properly robed; that they had not purified themselves with water from the laver; that they were so self-important that they had not married, thinking no woman was good enough for them; or that they were impatient for Moses and Aaron to die so they could become the leaders of Israel.

Some speculated that the sin for which they were punished did not happen on that day at all. It had occurred months earlier at Mount Sinai. The text says that Nadav and Avihu along with seventy elders ascended the mountain and "saw the God of Israel" (Ex. 24:10). God "did not raise his hand against the leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank" (Ex. 24:11). The implication is that they deserved punishment then for not averting their eyes, or for eating and drinking at so sacred an encounter. But God delayed the punishment so as not to cause grief on the day He made a covenant with the people.[3]

These are all midrashic interpretations: true, valid and important but not the plain sense of the verse. The text is clear. On each of the three occasions where their death is mentioned, the Torah says merely that they offered "unauthorised fire". The sin was that they did something that had not been commanded. They did so, surely, for the highest motives. Moses said to Aaron immediately after they died that this is what God had meant when he said, "'Among those who are near me I will be sanctified" (Lev. 10:3). A Midrash says that Moses was comforting his brother by saying, "They were closer to God than you or me."[4]

The history of the word "enthusiasm", though, helps us understand the episode. Nadav and Avihu were "enthusiasts", not in the contemporary sense but in the sense in which the word was used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Enthusiasts were people who, full of religious passion, believed that God was inspiring them to do deeds in defiance of law and convention. They were very holy but they were also potentially very dangerous. David Hume in particular saw that enthusiasm in this sense is diametrically opposed to the mindset of priesthood. In his words, "all enthusiasts have been free from the yoke of ecclesiastics, and have expressed great independence of devotion; with a contempt of forms, ceremonies, and traditions."

Priests understand the power, and thus the potential danger, of the sacred. That is why holy places, times and rituals must be guarded with rules, the way a nuclear power station must be protected by the most careful insulation. Think of the accidents that have occurred when this has failed: Chernobyl, for example, or Fukushima in Japan in 2011. The results can be devastating and lasting.

To bring unauthorised fire to the Tabernacle might seem a small offence, but a single unauthorised act in the realm of the holy causes a breach in the laws around the sacred

By Tsipi and Jerry Hawk
in memory of Tsipi's father,
Chazzan Sherwood Goffin z"l,
on his 5th Yahrzeit on 27 Adar Sheni

Avoid Disappointment! Reserve dedications as soon as possible. Please note that due to my schedule, dedications for the weeks after after Pesach through Shavuot will need to be submitted now. It may be difficult for me to add them later during this period. Thank you for your encouragement and support of Likutei Divrei Torah.
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that can grow in time to a gaping hole. Enthusiasm, harmless though it might be in some of its manifestations, can quickly become extremism, fanaticism and religiously motivated violence. That is what happened in Europe during the wars of religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and it is happening in some religions today. As David Hume observed: "Human reason and even morality are rejected [by enthusiasts] as fallacious guides, and the fanatic madman delivers himself over blindly" to what he believes to be Divine inspiration, but what may in fact be overheated self-importance or frenzied rage.

We now understand in detail that the human brain contains two different systems, what Daniel Kahneman calls "thinking fast and slow". The fast brain, the limbic system, gives rise to emotions, particularly in response to fear. The slow brain, the prefrontal cortex, is rational, deliberative, and capable of thinking through the long term consequences of alternative courses of action. It is no accident that we have both systems. Without instinctive responses triggered by danger we would not survive. But without the slower, deliberative brain we would find ourselves time and again engaging in destructive and self-destructive behaviour. Individual happiness and the survival of civilisation depend on striking a delicate balance between the two.

Precisely because it gives rise to such intense passions, the religious life in particular needs the constraints of law and ritual, the entire intricate minuet of worship, so that the fire of faith is contained, giving light and a glimpse of the glory of God. Otherwise it can eventually become a raging inferno, spreading destruction and claiming lives. After many centuries in the West, we have tamed enthusiasm to the point where we can think of it as a positive force. We should never forget, however, that it was not always so. That is why Judaism contains so many laws and so much attention to detail – and the closer we come to God, the more we need.

[1] David Hume, "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm," in Essays Moral, Political, and Literary (1742-1754).
[2] This is based on the statement in Lev. 16:1, that the two sons of Aaron died when "they drew near before the Lord," implying that they had come too close, i.e. they had entered the Holy of Holies.
[3] The seventy elders were punished later. See Rashi to Ex, 24:10.
[4] Midrash Aggadah (Buber) ad loc.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And when Moses heard [Aaron's argument] it found favor in his eyes" (Leviticus 10:19).

Our biblical portion opens with the exalting and exultant ceremonies of the consecration of the desert sanctuary, closely followed by a description of the tragic death of Aaron's two eldest sons. These events lead to a fascinating halakhic discussion between Moses and Aaron which has important ramifications for our religious attitudes today.

The sin-offering of the New Moon was brought on the first day of Nisan, which was also the eighth day of the consecration, the banner day on which the sanctuary stood erect and completed. It was also the day of the tragic death of Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu. After seeing to the removal of their bodies, Moses immediately inquired after the meat of the New Moon offering. Hearing that it had been burned rather than consumed by Aaron and his two remaining children, he "became angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the remaining sons of Aaron. Why did you not eat the sin offering in the sacred area? After all, it is the holy of the holies, and it was given to you [to eat] so that you might bear the sin of the congregation, and bring them forgiveness before the Lord" (Lev. 10:16, 17).

Aaron countered, "Behold this day they [Eleazer and Ithamar] have brought their sin offering and whole-burned offering before the Lord, and then such [tragic things] have befallen us; had I eaten the [New Moon] sin offering today, would it have been pleasing in the eyes of the Lord?" (ibid 19).

Moses and Aaron both understood that despite the great loss of his sons Nadab and Abihu, the High Priest and his remaining sons must continue to fulfill their priestly duties, especially during this period of consecration. Their mourning must go on in silence ("And Aaron was silent" 10:3) and their public functions must continue uninterrupted. Despite their personal sorrow, they are public servants whose service to the nation must continue unabated.

And so Moses commands them: "Do not dishevel [the hair on] your heads and do not tear your garments lest you die and anger strikes the entire community… You must not go outside the entrance to the Tent of Meeting lest you die, for the Lord's anointing oil is upon you" (Lev. 10:6, 7). They cannot ritually defile themselves by attending a funeral or a burial; they cannot express any outward signs of mourning. They must remain within the sanctuary, and see to the proper functioning of the ritual.

Moses understood that the divine law, which prohibited them from outward mourning and demanded that they continue to officiate in the sanctuary, included not only the requirement of bringing the sacrifices, but also their consumption. Hence, when Moses sees that although they offered the New Moon offering, they burned the meat instead of eating it, he becomes angry with them. He chides the remaining sons, so as not to embarrass his elder brother, but his displeasure is directed at all three.

Aaron responds forthrightly and even a bit sharply (the verb vayedaber is used to refer to strong and even harsh speech), insisting that they brought all of the commanded sacrifices that day, thereby fulfilling all their obligations. However, he reminds his brother that their family was also struck by an unspeakable tragedy that day. Would God who took the two boys have approved of their father and brothers demonstrating all the requisite rejoicing engendered by eating a sacrifice from "the table of the most high," in the fellowship of the divine? Moses himself referred to the boys as "those near to God, through whom God is to be sanctified" (10:3).

Aaron contends that although in the face of tragedy, we must continue performing our official duties, we cannot be expected to celebrate with God as well. "And Moses heard, and [Aaron's words] were pleasing in his eyes." Rashi cites the midrash "Moses accepted Aaron's argument, and was not ashamed to say that indeed, he had not received a divine directive compelling the mourning high priest to partake of the sacrificial meal" (Lev. 10:19, 20, Rashi ad loc). Aaron's argument that the law also takes into account human feelings and emotions is accepted.

Perhaps it is on this basis that my revered teacher Rav Soloveitchik was wont to explain the halakhot of an onen (one whose parent, sibling, child or spouse has died, during the period between death and burial). He suggested that such a person is forbidden to perform the commandments (pray, make blessings before eating, etc.); not only because "one who is occupied with a mitzva (in this case, burying the dead) is not obligated to perform another mitzva at the same time," but also because God gives the mourner an opportunity to be angry at Him. God removes from him the obligation to serve Him with the usual commandments when he has been struck by the death of a close and beloved relative in a world which is not yet redeemed.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

We Are All "Survivors"

Parshas Shemini contains a most unfortunate incident (at the beginning of the tenth perek). It is an incredible story. As the Mishkan was being dedicated, the inaugural korbonos were being offered on Rosh Chodesh Nissan. Then Aharon's two eldest sons – Nadav and Avihu – brought a "foreign fire" and they were struck down from Heaven, then and there in the Mishkan.

Following this incident, the pasuk records: "And Moshe spoke to Aharon, and to Elazar and to Isamar, his sons that remained (hanosarim)…" (Vayikra 10:12). Rashi comments on the word "hanosarim" – this teaches that the death penalty was also decreed upon them (Elazar and Isamar). Literally, the pasuk means that Moshe spoke to Elazar and Isamar "the surviving sons." Rashi indicates that these two sons should have been swept away in the heavenly decree as well, not because of what happened in the Mishkan on that inaugural day, but because of Aharon's

participation in the sin of the Egel haZahav (Golden Calf). This is alluded to by the pasuk "Moreover, the L-rd was very angry with Aharon to have destroyed him…(l'hashmido)" (Devarim 9:20). Both here and in Parshas Ekev, Rashi explains (based on Amos 2:9) that the Hebrew word l'hashmido indicates the eradication of children.

So, in truth, these two younger sons were supposed to die as well, but Moshe's prayer for Aharon after the incident of the Egel haZahav was effective in cancelling half the decree, as it is written "…and I prayed also for Aharon at that time" (Devarim 9:20). That is why Elazar and Isamar are referred to here as the "remaining" or the "surviving" sons.

I once saw a very poignant observation from the Shemen haTov (Rav Dov Ze'ev Weinberger). The terminology "survivors" that we use today has a special connotation. The word "survivors" refers to people who survived the Holocaust. In other words, "survivors" are people who were in Europe and either were in the camps and survived or somehow managed to hide during that period. They are "survivors." However, people who were in America – they are not "survivors." They did not experience the horrors of what happened in Europe during World War II.

Rav Weinberger writes that this is a mistake. Of course, people in America did not experience the horrors, but nonetheless, we still all need to look at ourselves as survivors. Had Hitler, yemach shemo, had his way, there would not be any Jews left anyplace on the face of the Earth. Had Hitler been victorious, and had he defeated the Allies, he would have gone after the Jews no matter where they were. He was out to make us an extinct race. So, whether we or our parents happened to be in Europe or wherever they may have been – we see from this Rashi "hanosarim" that someone is called a survivor if he was "supposed to have died" and for some reason, by Hashem's mercy, he did not die.

The practical lesson behind this is that just as survivors feel a certain responsibility, which may change their lives and make them feel like they now have a mission – we all need to feel like that. If someone is a survivor, he feels that he was saved for a reason. We see this often. People who survive a plane crash or some other near-death experience often walk away and say, "I survived this; therefore, I need to do something different with my life. I cannot go on living 'as is.'"

This is the point of the Shemen HaTov. We need to all look at ourselves as survivors and implement the implications that this implies. If not for the mercy of Hashem that we happened to be in America or that our parents or grandparents happened to be in America, or that Baruch Hashem, Hitler was defeated (that was also part of the 'Yad HaShem'), we too could have been swept away by the Holocaust.

Admitting Errors Demonstrates Greatness

The next part of the parsha begins with the pesukim: "And Moshe diligently inquired after the goat of the sin-offering, and behold, it was burnt and he was angry with Elazar and with Isamar, the sons of Aharon that were left, saying: Why have you not eaten the sin-offering in the place of the sanctuary, seeing it is most holy, and He has given it you to bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before Hashem." (Vayikra 10:16-17)

This is a difficult parsha to understand. The Gemara (Zevachim 101b) explains what was going on over here: On that day of the inaugural setting up of the Mishkan, three korbonos were brought – (1) the goat of Rosh Chodesh; (2) the korban of Nachshon ben Aminadav (the first of the nessiyim (tribal princes), who each brought their own korban on each of the first twelve days of the Mishkan's dedication); (3) a sin offering brought in conjunction with the inauguration of the Mishkan (Chatas haMiluim).

The halacha is that an onen (a person who has just lost a close relative) is forbidden from eating kodoshim (sacrificial meat). Moshe Rabbeinu came to Aharon and said "Listen, Aharon, you and your sons are now onenim by virtue of the fact that you just lost you brothers and sons. An onen is normally forbidden to eat kodoshim, but the Ribono shel Olam told me that this is an exception to the rule! In this situation, I am telling you in the name of Hashem that you may eat these korbonos, in spite of the fact that you are onenim.

Moshe Rabbeinu therefore expected that these three korbonos should all be eaten. Moshe noticed that one of these three offerings had not been consumed but was rather burnt – namely the goat of Rosh Chodesh. He therefore criticized his brother and nephews for this negligence: Aharon responded to Moshe that his own understanding was that this special exception that Hashem made only applied to the two special korbonos that were brought in conjunction with the inauguration of the Mishkan (namely korbonos #2 & #3 above). However, it should not apply to the standard goat of Rosh Chodesh offering, which was in no way connected with the inaugural service, but was merely brought on that day because the inauguration happened to coincide with Rosh Chodesh. Therefore, regarding that korbon, there was no exception, and since they were onenim, they felt it necessary to burn the korban rather than eat it.

In other words, Aharon was telling his younger brother "Rav Moshe, you are wrong. You made a mistake in your assumption!" That is the discussion that is going on between Aharon and Moshe.

The Torah comments: When Moshe heard Aharon's argument, he was pleased (Vayikra 10:20). Rashi here, based on the Gemara in Zevachim cited above, comments "He admitted his mistake and was not embarrassed. He did not say 'I never heard this,' but rather 'I heard this but made a mistake.'"

Rashi is saying that Moshe had a decision to make. He recognized that Aharon was right and he was wrong. He could have said one of two things: He could have said, "Aharon, I didn't hear that, I didn't know that; but I hear what you are saying – it makes sense. I believe you are correct." Moshe Rabbeinu did not say that. Rather, he said "Aharon, you are right and I am wrong. I heard that and I forgot!" He admitted his mistake and was not embarrassed to do so.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz says that if any of us would be in that situation, our natural instinct would be to say "I never heard that." It is extremely hard to say the words "I heard that and I forgot." By saying those words, Moshe Rabbeinu was opening himself up to the charge that the entire Torah and our entire tradition could go down the drain! Once Moshe Rabbeinu said "I heard that and I forgot" the immediate reaction might be "Well, what else did you forget?" By saying that, Moshe risked losing his credibility. People might ask "How can we ever trust you again?"

Moshe could have rationalized that he wasn't protecting his ego, but rather he was trying to preserve the integrity of the entire Mesorah of Torah. And yet, he openly said, "I made a mistake." There are no exceptions to the rule "Distance yourself from falsehood…" (Shemos 23:7) It took tremendous fortitude and strength of character for Moshe to say "I heard it and I forgot!"

As I pointed out on other occasions, by us, the sign of a true leader is the ability to say "I made a mistake," the ability to say "I'm wrong," the ability to say "I'm sorry." This goes all the way back to Parshas Vayechi. When the pasuk says that Yaakov Avinu chose Yehudah to become the monarch (Bereshis 49:8), Targum Yonoson explains that Yehudah was chosen as the source of the monarchy because he had the character and integrity to admit by Tamar, "She is more righteous than I" (Bereshis 38:26).

When Rav Chaim Soloveitchik became the Rosh Yeshiva in Volozhin, he had a revolutionary way of analyzing Talmud which did not sit well with many of the "powers that be." People claimed that the only reason Rav Chaim got his job was because he married the granddaughter of the Rosh Yeshiva, the Netziv (Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin). People claimed that he was really not fit to be given such a prominent role in the Yeshiva. So, they convened a Beis Din. Rav Chaim was asked to say a shiur in front of several of the Gedolim of 19th century European Jewry (including Reb Reuven Duenaburger, the Rabbi of Dvinsk, Reb Yitzhak Elchanan Spektor, the

Rabbi of Kovno, and Rav Yehoshua Yitzchak Shapira, known as Rav Eizele Charif).

Rav Chaim gave the shiur. It was a brilliant shiur, which wowed the entire Beis Medrash. In the middle of the shiur, Rav Chaim remembered that there was a Peirush HaRambam on the Mishna somewhere that demolished the entire intellectual structure that he had constructed. He closed his Gemara and said, "I'm sorry I made a mistake. I am wrong" and sat down. Remember that this was his 'Shabbas Proba' (rabbinic audition) in front of some of the greatest Eastern European Rabbonim of the time. The Gedolim who were there proclaimed, "Rav Chaim is worthy to be the Rosh Yeshiva in Volozhin." Someone who possesses such striving for truth that allows him to accept personal embarrassment in order to achieve the truth is qualified to become a Rosh Yeshiva. The capacity to say, "I made a mistake. I apologize. I'm wrong." qualifies a person for the monarchy. It qualified Moshe to be Moshe Rabbeinu.

Strange Sentence Syntax Suggests Subservient Service for Selective Statutes (i.e., Chukim)

Hilchos Kashrus – which animals are kosher, which birds are kosher, and which fish are kosher – appears for the first time in the Torah here in Parshas Shemini. The very last pasuk in the parsha reads: "to make a difference between the unclean and the clean and between the living things that may be eaten and the living things that shall not be eaten (u'bein haChaya ha'ne'echeles u'bein haChaya asher lo sei'achel)." (Vayira 11:47).

Someone who is sensitive to Hebrew grammar will notice an anomaly when studying this pasuk. If we were to write the end of this pasuk, we would write "u'bein haChaya ha'ne'echeles u'bein haChaya asher eino ne'echeles." This would be a parallel statement, using the same tense and construction for the positive and negative parts of the statement. Alternatively, we would write "u'bein haChaya asher sei'achel u'bein haChaya asher lo sei'achel." That too would have provided appropriate grammatical symmetry between the positive and negative parts of the statement.

However, the pasuk switches grammatical constructs in the middle of a sentence – between the animal that can be eaten and the animal that you shall not eat. This seems awkward. Why does the Torah do this? My son, Yakov, told me that he once heard the following observation from Rav Yochonan Zweig:

There are different indications throughout Chazal of what a person's attitude should be towards fulfillment of mitzvos and abstention from Torah prohibitions. In other words, should my inclination be that I am anyway going to do or not do certain activities, leaving the fact that Hashem told me to do or not do these specific activities as somewhat of an afterthought – as if the person is expressing "full agreement" with Hashem's mitzvos? Or, should a person's attitude be "If I had my preference, I would certainly do X, Y, Z (against what the Torah instructs); except Hashem told me not to do it, and therefore I am complying.

Is the proper hashkafa to observe Torah because it makes sense to you and you agree with it, or is the proper hashkafa to feel that you are forced to observe something against your inclination because you are being loyal to Hashem's instructions? Which is the preferable approach to mitzvah observance?

The Rambam, in his Shemoneh Perakim, gives us a guideline to answer this question: He says it depends on what type of mitzvah it is. It depends whether it is a Mitzvah Sichlee (a logical, rational mitzvah) or not. Do not steal is a logical mitzva. Everyone knows that we cannot endure in a society that steals. The Torah says to honor our parents. This is a rational mitzvah. Our parents brought us into this world, they raised us, they fed us, etc.

Other mitzvos are not rational. They are called chukim. We do not understand the reason behind them. Examples of chukim are the mitzvos at the end of Parshas Shemini – forbidden foods. Kashrus is not "logical." Logically, there should not be a difference between eating a piece of beef and eating a piece of pork. What is the difference? What is wrong with pig? A large portion of the world eats pork and bacon.

What is wrong with shell fish? People who were chozer b'teshuva often say that the thing they miss most from their previous lifestyle is eating shell fish! The State of Maryland is the state of the Blue Crab. People come to Baltimore just to eat crab from the Chesapeake Bay! When I smell crab, I run the other way, but I am sure that if I was raised with crab and was fed crab as a child, I would also like crab. I know goyim who, when they smell Gefilte fish, run the other way! I like Gefilte fish because that is the way I was raised.

But what should my hashkafa be? The Rambam says that it depends. A person should not say "I hate pig. I hate shellfish." He should say "I would want to eat pork. I would want to eat crab. I would want to taste a cheese burger. I would want to have a sirloin steak or porter house steak, or all such things… But what can I do? The Ribono shel Olam told me not to do it!"

If that is the case, the pasuk makes beautiful sense. "Between the animal that can be eaten and between the animal that 'You shall not eat.'" We are not talking about an animal "that is not eaten." These forbidden animals (pigs, crabs, birds of prey, etc.) are very much eaten and I would enjoy eating them, but they are animals about which I have been commanded "You SHALL NOT eat" and therefore I don't eat them! That is why the Torah formulates the statement in this syntax.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

What is special about the number 8? The fact that this week's parasha is called Shemini, which means 'the eighth', issues an invitation to us to answer this question.

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

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

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

So if seven represents the perfection of people, and nine represents Hashem, eight represents the bridge, connecting us with our creator. That is why a baby boy has his 'brit milah' through which he establishes a covenant between himself and Hashem on the eighth day. That is why the festival of Chanukah is eight days long when we recall the divine intervention which saved our people. And that is why between Pesach and Shavuot for a period of 7×7 days we prepare ourselves for the re-enactment of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Once we reach that number 49, we are prepared for the festival of Shavuot, which takes places at the beginning of the eighth week, reminding us of that ultimate revelation when Hashem appeared to us, and of the first two of the ten commandments. He delivered them directly to us – the ultimate bridge between Heaven and earth.

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

and consumed the animal on the altar – there was that connection between Heaven and earth.

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

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Expanding Kedusha
Rabbi Elan and Nomi Mazer

The first half of Sefer Vayikra discusses two main topics, sanctity and purity. Sanctity, kedusha, relates to the laws of korbanot at the time of the Mishkan and Beit HaMikdash. Purity, tahara, relates to a series of situations and objects that can cause a person to be considered impure.

Both of these subjects are very difficult for modern Jews to relate to – they are very far from our current daily worship, and at times seem even antithetical to our religious aspirations. Colloquially we refer to kedusha, holiness, as something of great spiritual significance, however their original association is with animal sacrifices, which are an extremely physical and material experience, quite at odds with our current understanding of the term..

I would like to step back for a moment to look at the structure of these parshiot in order to better understand the role that Kedusha and Tahara play in our avodat hashem.

The first two and a half parshiyot of Sefer Vayikra speak about korbanot, In middle of Parshat Shemini, culminating with the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, who improperly entered the kodesh kodashim . After these deaths, the Torah changes topics in Parshat Acharei Mot, and switches to the laws of tahara and tuma, purity and impurity.

Why is it that the story of Nadav and Avihu serves as the transition between these two topics? Further, at the beginning of parshat Tazria, the Torah transitions back from the laws of purity and revists the laws of korbanot, this time focusing on the service of Yom Kippur which takes place in the kodesh hakodashim. Oddly enough, the Torah brings back the deaths of Nadav and Avihu as the transition between these two topics.

וַיְדַבֵּר ד׳ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אַחֲרֵי מוֹת שְׁנֵי בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן בְּקָרְבָתָם
לִפְנֵי־ד׳ וַיָּמֻתוּ׃

Hashem spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they drew too close to the presence of Hashem.

וַיֹּאמֶר ד׳ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה דַּבֵּר ׀ אֶל־אַהֲרֹן אָחִיךָ וְאַל־יָבֹא בְכָל־עֵת
אֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ מִבֵּית לַפָּרֹכֶת אֶל־פְּנֵי הַכַּפֹּרֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאָרֹן
וְלֹא יָמוּת כִּי בֶּעָנָן אֵרָאֶה עַל־הַכַּפֹּרֶת׃

Hashem said to Moses: Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come at any time. Into the Kodesh behind the curtain, in front of the cover that is upon the ark, lest he die; for I appear in the cloud over the cover.

In his seminal book Mesilat Yesharim, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato explains that the difference between tahara and kedusha is that the former is about separating from the material world, while the latter is about engaging the material and sanctifying it.

The Torah here is teaching us a very powerful lesson. Kedusha is the goal of the Jewish people, as we were told at Sinai that we will be ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש – a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We begin this task in the Beit Hamikdash by sanctifying the mundane, using material objects and raising them to the level of holiness, focusing physical things towards a higher purpose.

However, we must realize that kedusha is something extremely delicate. When we mix the worlds of the spiritual and physical it is easy to become confused, and to lose track or veer away from our objective. The role of tuma and tahara is to make sure that we have a heightened sense of morality and clarity of what is right and what is wrong, and the understanding of proper manner in which we can approach the concept of kedusha. Therefore, it is essential that the section of tahara precedes the Yom Kippur service, for only when we have fully internalized the message of tahara are we ready to enter the Kodesh HaKedoshim on the holiest day of the year without falling into the pitfalls of Nadav and Avihu.

This process does not end in the kodesh kodashim, Sefer Vayikra does not conclude with the Yom Kippur service. Once we achieve the highest level of kedusha on Yom Kippur, in the proper way, through the tahara of the Kohen and the entire nation through the Yom Kippur service, the Torah tells us that something amazing can happen. The parshiot in the final section of the sefer continue with the world of kedusha – however this time leaving the confines of the Mishkan to take the kedusha out into the greater world, to family relationships, sanctity of community, holiness of time, and sanctifying the land in the sabbatical year.

In the second half of Sefer Vayikra, the parshiot speak again about kedusha, however in a different context, that is, not within the confines of the Beit HaMikdash. Acharei Mot speaks about kedusha in relationships, Kedoshim explains how kedusha can be found within society, Emor focuses on the kedusha of the Kohanim and holy times, and Behar teaches us about the kedusha of the land during the sabbatical year.

In order to create this expansive reality, we need to take the right steps to ensure that as we engage in the material world, it is done with the proper care that such an endeavor necessitates.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky
Redemption Through Renewal

The four parshios of Shekalim, Zachor, Parah, and HaChodesh all represent events that normally occur at this time of year, and are similar to the "inyana d'yoma" leining that we read on yom tov. Shekalim had to be brought at this time of the year, Zachor presents a framework for Purim, and Parah commemorates the fact that all of Klal Yisroel had to purify themselves, for everyone was obligated to partake in the korbon Pesach. Parshas HaChodesh, however, does not fit this pattern. It is true that they had to be mekadesh the month of Nissan, but not any more so than other months; Pesach needed a specific calendar date, but so does Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and Succos. HaChodesh does not seem to be more inyana d'yoma now than at other times. It is also true that the mitzvah of kiddush hachodesh was first given at the time of Pesach, but there doesn't seem to be a particular reason for this. So why is Parshas HaChodesh included in this series?

In order to understand this, we need appreciate the depth of the miracle of Pesach. We tend to focus on Pharoh, his power, and his control of the Jewish people, Hashem in turn overpowering him, etc. But the real problem was much deeper. Klal Yisroel just about did not exist!

Chazal comment on the verse "or has G-d ever taken a 'nation from within a nation', that it is like a shepherd taking a fetus from the womb of a mother." The Maharal explains that Klal Yisroel was in a fetal stage. To the naked eye they appeared to be part and parcel of the Egyptian people. They themselves were not yet fully conscious of being a nation. They had come down to Mitzrayim as a family, and had become embedded therein. We speak of how terrible assimilation is, but this was a "pre-assimilation"- they had yet to really exist. They were a potential people, but not an actualized nation. This is why Hashem taking a "nation from within a nation" was an extraordinary act.

The mitzvah of kiddush hachodesh, represents an extraordinary power given over to Klal Yisroel, and that is the "power to renew". Chodesh-month and chadash-new share the same root, for the month is the cycle of constant renewal in the world, each month being a "renewal" of the waning moon. Furthermore, the one aspect of nature that imprisons us is time. We are the product of what was. Therefore, genuine chiddush and total change seem well-nigh impossible.

Not only was the act of "creating" a people performed by Hashem, but He also gave us that same ability. We now have the power to recreate ourselves anew. It is akin to being able to lift ourselves by our bootstraps. It is an extraordinary power, and it means that in fact, no matter how far we sink, as long as we are "Yisroel" we can recast ourselves even out of seeming nothingness!

The gemara actually makes a point - seemingly for technical halachic reasons - that the moon totally disappears for a few hours, in a way that it is impossible to see at all. This means that the event of renewal of the month happens out of a seeming void, which was exactly the state of affairs in Mitzrayim.

So, although kiddush hachodesh is halachically relevant every month, its true essence is both needed and expressed in the month of Pesach. The seed of the aavos had disappeared for two centuries from the horizon, and reappeared from seeming nothingness. This gift of renewal has now been endowed to Klal Yisroel.

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

Sicha of Harav Aharon Lichtenstein, z"l
Innovation and Routine

"Vayehi ba-yom ha-shemini" - on the eighth day, the mishkan was dedicated. Chazal enumerate many unique aspects of this festive day. The Gemara (Gittin 60a) mentions eight sections of the law which were taught on that day. Rashi (quoting Shabbat 87b and the Seder Olam) emphasizes that it was a day of "firsts" - it marked the inauguration of the kehuna, the sacrificial service, the priestly blessing, etc. Undoubtedly, the pinnacle of the day was reached when the fire descended from Heaven for the first time and devoured the sacrifice. It was a day of innovation, the beginning of a new chapter for the Jewish people.

There is, however, another perspective on "the eighth day," which both complements and contrasts with its being a day of innovation. The previous week had been that period known as "Yemei Ha-miluim" - a Grand Opening ceremony. According to Rashi, every day the mishkan had been assembled and dismantled; each day the mishkan was something new and extraordinary. The eighth day heralded a new era for the mishkan - that of routine service. True, it was the beginning of this new epoch, but by its very nature it was an ORDINARY day, from which point on the mishkan and avoda (service) would be permanent fixtures in their lives.

The transition from the extraordinary to the routine is further exemplified by the personalities with whom the avoda was associated. Moshe Rabbeinu was the sole servant in the mishkan during the Yemei Ha-miluim. Apparently, his status cannot be seen as that of a temporary Kohen Gadol (High Priest). The Gemara (Avoda Zara 34a) notes that when Moshe served in the mishkan during the seven preparatory days, he wore only the four white garments of a regular kohen, and not the additional four golden garments of the Kohen Gadol. Rashi (ibid., s.v. Moshe) explains that Moshe's service in the miskhan was "al pi ha-dibbur," by a special divine directive, and was unconnected to the kehuna (priesthood). Hence, the "Yom Ha-shemini" represents the transition from world of prophecy, personified by Moshe, to the world of priesthood, characterized by Aharon.

Prophecy is pure, direct spirituality and religious inspiration, in contrast to the formalized institution of kehuna. The priesthood is handed down from father to son, whereas the gift of prophecy is not inherited. Furthermore, no area has more detailed halakhot explicitly described in the Torah than the Temple. In essence, the kehuna represents the world of organized religion.

Why were the Yemei Ha-miluim at all necessary? Was it purely a Grand Opening ceremony?

The week of inauguration, we suggest, was designed to set the tone for the institution of kehuna. Judaism vehemently rejects the notion of "pure spirituality" untamed by the rigors of Halakha. However, the dangers of organized religion are also clear; the prophets regularly criticize meaningless and uninspired performance of religious ceremonies. By working in the mishkan for the first week of its existence, Moshe infused the institution of priesthood with the burning enthusiasm and deep fervor that typifies prophecy. Indeed, according to one opinion in the Gemara (Zevachim 101b), Moshe continued to receive matnot kehuna (priestly gifts) during the rest of the Israelites' forty-year sojourn in the wilderness; the umbilical cord between prophecy and priesthood may not have been cut during that entire period.

The tension and balance that exist on a national level between the excitement and innovative spirit of prophecy, on the one hand, and the constancy of kehuna, on the other hand, are integral to every individual's religious struggle. Our lives are necessarily rooted in the rigors of day-to-day activities, and our religious observance is detailed and prescribed by Halakha, down to the minutest details. The challenge, though, is to unite this structured life with inspiration, fervor, and fire - to unite kehuna with prophecy. *(This sicha was delivered on leil Shabbat, Parashat Shemini 5755 [1995] Summarized by Jeremy Winson.)*

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez: Hope Springs Eternal

The biblical festivals are all in the transition seasons – in the spring or the fall/autumn, never in the heart of winter or summer.

The Torah is telling us that ultimately, spiritual life as reflected through our chagim have to be times of growth. Life cannot be static. It has to be a transition time. A time when the seasons of life around us are in transition.

That is the essence of hachodesh hazeh lachem, as we usher in THE month of Nissan, the beginning of the redemption from Egypt. The month which is called both "the first of all months" and also "the month of spring". Nissan must always be at the time of transition from winter to summer, spring.

Spring is when nature around is coming to life again after the dark and difficult winter, hope springs eternal. Life is blossoming, there is life after challenges.

May we all use this time of spring, of renewal, to reconfigure and reenergize our spiritual lives.

The Routine and the Extraordinary

"It was on the eighth day…" Rashi and Ibn Ezra debate which day this verse speaks of. According to Rashi, "the eighth day" refers to Rosh Chodesh Nissan. During the seven previous days, the Mishkan had been assembled and dismantled daily, and only on this eighth day did Moshe erect the Mishkan permanently. Ibn Ezra, however, contends that the verse speaks of the eighth of Nissan. Either way, however, this day was clearly one of jubilant celebration. The Gemara (Gittin 60a) adds that eight "parshiyot" of the Torah were taught that day, and it also comments (Shabbat 87b) that this day received ten "crowns," i.e., it boasted ten distinctions: the first day of creation (Sunday), the inauguration of kehuna (priesthood), service in the Mikdash, consumption of sacrificial meat, etc. The pivotal moment of this momentous day occurred when the Shekhina descended for the first time, in the form of a heavenly fire. Indeed, this day revolved around the extraordinary; it was a day of firsts, the opening of a new chapter in the history of Am Yisrael.

On the other hand, however, we may speak as well of precisely the opposite character of this day. The eighth day marked the beginning of the routine "avoda" - ritualistic service - in the Mikdash, the day-to-day ritual, replete with dry, rigid halakhot and inherently bereft of any festive or extraordinary quality. This characteristic becomes particularly evident according to Rashi's position. For seven days the Mishkan had been assembled and then taken apart again. Throughout that week, the Mishkan served as a temporary structure and the service performed assumed the quality of a singular, one-time series of events. But on this eighth and final day, the Mishkan was erected once and for all for permanent use and entered the phase of routine and standard procedure.

Even according to Ibn Ezra, who believed that the Mishkan had already stood permanently throughout the previous week, there can be no doubt that a sense of jubilant novelty pervaded this seven-day period. One expression of this

extraordinary quality is Moshe's having served the role of kohen. Aharon and his sons assumed their position as kohanim only from the eighth day onward. The Gemara (Avoda Zara 34a) remarks that throughout the seven-day period Moshe wore the special "bigdei lavan," the priestly garments worn specifically on Yom Kippur, rather than the standard garb of the kohanim. Rashi (s.v. Moshe) explains that since Moshe was not a kohen, and his serving this role was merely a temporary measure enacted by the Almighty, he was considered like any non-kohen, who may not wear the priestly garments. Tosafot explain differently, claiming that the priestly garments had yet to be officially inaugurated and sanctified, and thus despite Moshe's status as full-fledged kohen during this week, he could not wear the standard priestly unifirm. But even Tosafot would concede that Moshe's serving as kohen constituted an aberration from the norm, and the routine procedures of the Mishkan service began only on the eighth day.

The fact that a prophet, rather than a kohen, officiated over the service in the Mishkan throughout the period of the "milu'im" is of great significance. Prophecy symbolizes novelty, that which lies beyond the ordinary. The beholding of prophecy is an extraordinary, exalted event, full of vitality and spiritual power. The goal of the prophet is to induce change. Priesthood, by contrast, involves a routine, day-in and day-out service. The kohanim carry out the same responsibilities each day and must ensure strict adherence to a myriad of dry and detailed laws. Their service is marked by scrupulous observance and loyalty to the system. In fact, the Gemara in Masekhet Yoma speaks at length about the oath forced upon the high priest that he would not deviate from the regulations of the Yom Kippur service. Additionally, priesthood is transmitted through inheritance from father to son, while prophecy can be achieved only through personal effort and initiative. Part of the routine of priesthood is its passage from one generation to the next, thus affording it a quality of succession and consistency. Each prophecy, however, differs from the other, and each is stamped with the prophet's own unique individuality.

This situation of rigorous routine in the Mikdash creates a problem of sorts. Drowned by the detail and dry rules, the kohanim could potentially lose their vitality and sense of newness as they perform their service. One may never allow his service of the Almighty to become stale, routine procedure; one may not relate to his observance as only a day-to-day, mechanical mode of conduct. Both the service in the Mikdash and the service to God of each and every Jew must include both components - priesthood and prophecy. On the one hand, one must meticulously adhere to every letter of the law and not deviate even slightly from any detail of the Halakha. His life must be filled with rituals and deeds which constantly reflect a scrupulous halakhic awareness. At the same time, one must serve the Almighty with life and vitality, always searching for ways to progress further, to arrive at something new.

Moshe's officiating during the seven days of the "milu'im" was necessary to impart the prophetic spirit of newness to the service in the Mikdash. This idea may also underlie the view that Moshe in fact officiated in the Mishkan throughout the forty years in the wilderness (Zevachim 101b). As we know, throughout the Bible, the priests and prophets engaged in varying sorts of struggles and conflicts. The prophets called for greater infusion of spiritual content into the sacrifice rituals, noting that the Almighty does not need the sacrifices themselves, but rather what they represent. The priests, on the other hand, stood watch over the meticulousness of divine service.

This idea is critical for each of us. As dwellers in the beit midrash, our lives are marked by routine and day-to-day work. Nevertheless, surrounded as we are by a general atmosphere of spiritual striving, we can and we must try to seize upon those precious moments of inspiration and infuse them into our daily lives, allow them to inform and inspire all our actions.

Once one leaves the confines of the yeshiva, this becomes harder. As I indicated before, it behooves each of us, both within yeshiva and without, to constantly search for novelty and vitality, while maintaining our unwavering commitment to every detail of the dry, technical halakhot. By infusing our halakhic observance with passion and spirituality, by building our connection to God through observing his mitzvot, we will truly be worthy successors of the prophets and priests.
(*Originally delivered on Leil Shabbat Parashat Shemini 5755 [1995]. Summarized by Matan Glidai. Translated by David Silverberg.)*

OU Dvar Torah

You Are What You Eat
Rabbi Ari Kahn
One of the distinguishing practices of Jewish observance is the distinct set of dietary considerations that constitutes the laws of kashrut.

In the early chapters of the Torah,the prohibition against eating any part of a live animal is introduced – not as a "Jewish" law, but rather as a universal practice. Later, in the chapters that detail the formation of the Jewish People,the law requiring separation between milk and meat –specifically, the commandment not to "cook a kid in its mother's milk" – is repeated several times. Subsequently, prohibitions against the consumption of blood and certain fats were added.

In the book of Vayikra, in Parashat Shmini, we are presented with a long and detailed list of prohibited and permitted animals, fowl and fish. The list is not accompanied by any explanatory verses; all of the laws of kashrut are given without rhyme or reason. These particular laws are generally characterized by the term "chok" or statute, a biblical term used to denote a decree, something beyond the constructs of human logic - the type of law that man never would have intuited or created in the context of the "social contract."

The propriety or even the permissibility of searching for reasons for such laws is debated among the commentaries; we are, by definition, incapable of understanding God's motives in creating these laws. On the other hand, many of our greatest sages encouraged all those who observe these laws to enhance their understanding of them from the human perspective: Rather than asking why God decreed that our diet should be governed by these specific rules, rather than asking how these laws affect us and our world, we are encouraged to approach hukim (Divine decrees) from the perspective of the adherent, and to ask, what is the spiritual message for me?[1] Subservience to laws of this type may constitute what Kierkegaard labeled a "leap of faith," but the subjective religious experience of the practitioner lies in the realm of the individual's intellectual, emotional and spiritual engagement with the mitzvah.

Dietary laws illustrate this distinction: The prohibition against eating a severed limb from a live animal (or, for that matter, severing a limb from a live animal), should require no explanation. Human decency recoils at the very thought of such barbaric behavior, and we require no symbolic interpretation for this universal prohibition. On the other hand, the prohibition against mixing milk and meat is not intrinsically repugnant in this way, and requires us to consider less literal levels of meaning: Milk is symbolic of the flow of life from mother to child.Although the Torah does permit us to eat meat, and, unavoidably, to take the life of an animal for this purpose, there are limitations that must be respected. The prohibition against mixing milk and meat implies that the flow of life symbolized by milk is incongruous with the consumption of flesh.To combine the two is to create an incongruity that dulls our sensitivity. Thus, although the law is transmitted without a rationale, the symbolism involved in this law speaks to the human condition. We do not ask what God's rationale is, nor do we examine the physical affects and outcomes of observance or non-observance. Instead, we discern a deeper message that impacts our inner spiritual world, and, at the same time, brings us closer to the Creator.

In this same way, we may now approach the laws in Parashat Shmini. The list of animals and birds that are deemed unkosher includes carnivorous species: Although eating meat is allowed, the animals we eat should be herbivores and not carnivores. Additionally, we are permitted to eat only fish that have scales and fins. On a functional level, fins serve an

interesting purpose: They allow fish to swim upstream, against the tide.

Perhaps these seemingly arbitrary sets of markers contain a great spiritual message: We are what we eat. We must be careful about the food we ingest, because it becomes a part of us, not only biologically, but also spiritually. Although we are permitted to eat meat, this should not be our defining trait. Furthermore, perhaps fish is an important part of our diet not only because it is a healthy source of protein, but because of the defining characteristic embodied in the signs of their kashrut: their ability to swim against the tide. This same ability has been a defining trait and an invaluable skill for Jews throughout history. Just as the laws of kashrut have, to a great extent,secured our identity as a separate people, our ability to swim against the tide has insured that we are not pulled by the shifting tides of time and fashion into oblivion.

[1] Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik discussed this distinction at length. An adaptation of some of The Rav's lectures on this topic may be found in Chapter 10 of Abraham Besdin's Man of Faith in the Modern World: Reflections of the Rav, vol. 2 (1989: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., Hoboken N.J.).

A Brave New Kosher World
Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Upon first glance, the Biblical laws governing kosher food appear random. Why should animals which chew their cud be kosher, while those with more direct digestive "flows" be forbidden? Why should split-hoofed animals be kosher while straight-pawed animals be banned? Selecting birds based on the bone structure of their tiny legs seems capricious. Though the criteria determining kosher items may seem haphazard, our tradition asserts that foods forbidden by Hashem are toxic to human health and hazardous for spiritual welfare. It is highly unlikely that science will uncover medical reasons to rationalize kosher dietary norms. However, faith does not require scientific ratification and we adhere to the laws of kosher with conviction that we are not just conforming to Hashem's will, but also, cultivating a healthier lifestyle and a purer spiritual existence.

A Life of Temperance - Beyond the benefits of avoiding specific 'harmful' foods, maintaining a kosher lifestyle adjusts our overall attitude toward the experience of eating. We depend upon food for nutrition and for survival. Furthermore, we draw great physical, emotional and social benefit from the experience of eating. Hashem desires this human benefit and our recitation of blessings before and after eating validates these enjoyments.

Yet, there is a thin line between enjoying eating and obsessing over food. A quick "recall" of the 180-day long party of Shushan - complete with an endless food-orgy and induced regurgitation - is enough to remind us of the horrors of unlimited food consumption. By banning most animals, the Torah isn't just protecting us from specific harmful species. It is also tailoring a lifestyle which balances the joy of food against the dangers of addiction or obsession.

I remember the horror that my revered rebbe HaRav Lichtenstein expressed upon reading a newspaper article that reviewed and rated the in-flight meals of various airlines. He was so dismayed that something so trivial should warrant this type of attention and interest! Similarly, he would routinely conclude his Torah lectures a half an hour after lunch began to train us not to be enslaved to our stomachs. I vividly recall the hunger pangs I sensed as I was being trained that moral and religious commitment were more important than my appetite. Keeping kosher should lend us overall dietary discipline.

Creating Distance - The section in parshat Shmini that details kosher and non-kosher animals concludes with the instruction to live our lives as "kodesh." The word kodesh is commonly interpreted as "holy" or pious" but actually instructs us to be "separate" or "detached" from this world. Hashem possesses no physical attributes and is therefore the ultimate kodesh - completely different from our reality and completely separate from it. In our attempt to simulate Hashem, we are also encouraged to be partially "detached" from this physical world. Limiting our food intake, partially disconnects us form the sensual pleasures of this world.

Judaism does not venerate extreme self-deprivation or ascetism. There are built-in limits upon fasting, upon celibacy and upon other forms of self-deprivation. However, we are meant to temper our desires and to impose our will over our cravings. The restrictions upon food intake and the strict laws of food preparation deters unbounded and unrestrained food indulgence.

Our Pesach experience is riveted by even stricter laws which limit food consumption far beyond the normal kosher routine. Chametz is not only forbidden to eat but cannot be owned; owning chametz may lead to inadvertently consuming chametz. Pesach commemorates our emancipation from the indignities of slavery and the genesis of a people who aspire toward spiritual nobility. The tightening of dietary restrictions during Pesach shields us from slipping back into slavery. Not just subjugation to a human tyrant but slavery to our base desires.

Kosher food limitations aren't just "targeted" laws preventing us from consuming hazardous species. These laws encourage us to calibrate our relationship with food. Eating healthy and enjoying our food are legitimate elements of physical emotional and spiritual well-being. Unlimited pursuit of food and unrestrained binging are not.

A Deliberate Life - In the concluding section of parshat Shemini, the Torah alludes to a third benefit of a kosher lifestyle: By preserving kosher laws we learn to separate between tamei (impure) and tahor (pure) animals. Kosher laws force us to make deliberate choices about our daily routine. Keeping kosher lessons us about making decisions in life. Just as we discriminate between pure and impure animals, we also take care to distinguish between moral and immoral behavior. We filter our cultural influences rather than mindlessly succumbing to them. These questions lie far beyond the scope of kosher laws, but if we are discriminatory "eaters," we also aim to be morally and religiously discerning people.

Has it Become too Easy? - By granting unprecedented access to a broad range of kosher food, the modern world has greatly simplified the experience of keeping kosher. The emergence of national and international kashrut organizations, coupled with the ability to efficiently transport kosher food around the globe, has provided reasonably accessible kosher food to a broad audience. Recently, kosher food accessibility for vacationers has dramatically expanded, liberating "kosher travel" around the globe.

In the state of Israel, we aim to provide national kosher coverage even for those who would not purposely choose kosher. As a kosher diet is fundamental to Jewish identity, we hope to provide this baseline to every Israeli citizen. In most instances, both in Israel and abroad, maintaining a kosher lifestyle requires much less exertion and far less struggle than it entailed for our ancestors.

At a practical level, these developments are welcome and have popularized kosher experience across a broad range of the Jewish world. However, the ease of keeping kosher may dull us to the value of keeping kosher. In many areas, our practice of religion has become decidedly easier than in the past. Take, for example the modern experience of Shabbat, which has become significantly upgraded through electricity, home appliances and Shabbat clocks. When religion becomes "too easy," the meaning behind religion becomes obscured. Struggle lends resolution to religion while facility and ease blur that resolution. If we lose sight of the "meaning" behind religious experience, it can become dry and flaccid. Has keeping kosher become too easy? Do we find meaning in keeping kosher or has it just become part of the "background" of Jewish life in the modern world?

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet
SHMINI 5784

From Allen.Klein@gmail.com & cshulman@gmail.com

Home Weekly Parsha SHMINI
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The parsha deals with the eighth day of the dedication of the Mishkan. In general, it can be stated that the eighth day after any event can be a time of challenge. The eighth day of life is the day of circumcision of male Jewish children. The eighth day – the day after the week of rejoicing of a young newly married couple - was and is the day when real married life with all of its joys and challenges begins.

The eighth day after the beginning of the holiday of Pesach in Israel is the day when we return to our ordinary lives and tasks and many times that is a moment of at least temporary depression. And here in the parsha the eighth day is transformed from the day of joy and supreme attainment to one of tragedy and silence.

The eighth day is a difficult day. But the main lesson here is that life is in reality a series of 'eighth days.' The eighth day is unpredictable, it can bring pain and sadness but it can also be inspiring and joyful, productive and worthy. So the eighth day syndrome has become a metaphor for life in general and certainly for Jewish life particularly.

Because of the potential problems and difficulties that the eighth day may bring, the Torah begins the parsha with the word "vayehi" which is not necessarily an expression of happiness. Here it will refer to the untimely deaths of the two sons of Aharon. But in general it serves as a warning to humans to view life cautiously and realistically. The Torah always teaches us to drive defensively in all areas of living. Aharon's reaction to the tragedy that has befallen him is noteworthy. The Torah emphasizes that he keep silent. Many times events occur in human lives that are so shocking, sudden and overwhelming that humans are left speechless. Silence then is really a reflex reaction. But here the Torah records Aharon's silence as an act of bravery, restraint and holiness and not as a reflex reaction to the destruction of half of his family.

It indicates that Aharon had plenty he could have said and could have taken Heaven to task, so to speak, but instead he himself chose to remain silent. The Talmud in many instances advocates the supremacy of silence over complaint, in fact over unnecessary speech generally. There is much to complain about from our human viewpoint of life and its events. Heaven states that the fact that we are alive and functioning should be sufficient to stifle any complaints.

This hard judgment is also one of the primary lessons of the eighth day. Aharon's unspoken heartbroken complaint and his unanswered, in fact unasked, question hang in the air of Jewish history – mysterious and unfathomable. This also is true of all eighth day challenges that face us - the righteous and faithful shoulder on.

The great Rebbe of Kotzk said famously: "For the believer there are no questions; for the non-believer there are no answers." We are all eighth day Jews. Let us also shoulder on to build the Jewish people in strength, compassion and belief.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

Spontaneity: Good or Bad?
SHEMINI
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

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":

לעיני כל ישראל: שנשאו לבו לשבור הלוחות לעיניהם, שנאמר (לעיל ט, יז) ואשברם לעיניכם,

והסכימה דעת הקב"ה לדעתו, שנאמר (שמות לד, א) אשר שברת, יישר כחך ששברת:

This refers to when Moses] took the liberty 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 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.

The Tribe of Levi – Public Servants

Revivim Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

Contrary to the claim that members of the tribe of Levi were studying Torah and not participating in the wars of Israel, the Torah and our Sages note a series of public roles that were placed upon the Levites and Priests * The Levites served in policing roles against criminals and deserting soldiers, and when necessary, they also joined the most elite combat units in the war itself * Their Torah study was largely by way of teaching the entire nation of Israel, and not just studying for themselves

The Role of the Tribe of Levi

Q: Some say that yeshiva students who do not enlist in the army are like the members of the tribe of Levi who studied in yeshivas and kollelim, and did not participate in the wars of Israel. According to them, the Rambam wrote this as well. Are their words correct according to the Torah?

A: There is no basis for their words. On the contrary, the members of the tribe of Levi were dedicated to public affairs, and were committed to this. In times of peace, their role was to go out to the nation and teach Torah, instruct in Jewish law, and serve as police officers for all matters of law and order regarding interpersonal matters, and matters between man and God.

And in times of war, their role was to strengthen the spirit of the fighters, like the Military Rabbinate and the Education Corps, and to serve as military police enforcing the draft laws on the entire nation, severely punishing deserters and those fleeing from the battlefield.

They also guarded the Holy Ark that went out with the fighters and the senior command that was close to it, in the capacity of the "king's legion" (IDF Special Forces Unit). And anyone who remained without a specific role was among the first to go out to battle with the other soldiers, as befits public servants of the highest rank.

After defining all their roles, I will briefly explain each detail.

The Role of the Tribe of Levi to Teach the Ways of God to Israel

God sanctified the members of the tribe of Levi, led by the Priests, to perform the service of the Temple, and teach Torah to all of Israel. In practice, the work in the Temple was only about two weeks a year, according to the rotation of priestly and Levite shifts, and for the rest of the year, they taught Torah to all of Israel, as it is stated:

"They shall teach Your judgments to Jacob, and Your Torah to Israel" (Deuteronomy 33:10).

They also served in rabbinical and judicial roles, as it is stated:

"If a case is too baffling for you to decide, be it a controversy over homicide, civil law, or assault—matters of dispute in your courts—you shall promptly repair to the place that your God will choose, and appear before the Levitical priests, or the magistrate in charge at the time, and present your problem, and they will tell you the word of judgment" (Deuteronomy 17:8-9).

The prophet Malachi also said about the sons of Levi:

"I had with him a covenant of life and well-being…Proper rulings were in his mouth, and nothing perverse was on his lips; he served Me with complete loyalty, and held the many back from iniquity. For the lips of a priest guard knowledge, and rulings are sought from his mouth; for he is a messenger of GOD of Hosts" (Malachi 2:5-7).

In order for the Priests and Levites to be able to fulfill their role, the Torah decreed that no portion in the Land would be given to them, but rather they would be spread throughout all the borders of Israel, and each tribe would allocate cities for them to live in its portion (Numbers 35:1-8). And so the Children of Israel did (Joshua 21:3).

The Tithes and Terumah for Torah Teachers

The Torah commanded the Children of Israel to provide for the Levites and Priests through tithes and terumah (great offering) so they would not need to engage in earning a livelihood, and could be Torah teachers and Jewish law instructors. The intention was not for them to study in yeshiva halls for years, but rather to study Torah in order to teach it to the public. As the general commandment of Torah study is mentioned in the Torah as a commandment to teach one's students and children (Deuteronomy 6:7, 11:19, Sifri there, Kiddushin 31a).

They were called the "upholders of the Torah." As King Hezekiah instructed:

"And he said to the people, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to give the portion for the Kohanim and the Levites, so that they could strengthen themselves in the Torah of Hashem" (II Chronicles 31:4). Our Sages said:

"Whoever upholds the Torah of Hashem has a portion, and whoever does not uphold the Torah of Hashem does not have a portion" (Chullin 130b).

According to Rabbi Samson ben Abraham ((ר"ש and Rabbeinu Asher ((רא"ש, it is forbidden to give gifts to an am ha'aretz (ignorant person). In contrast, according to the Rambam, it is permitted to give gifts to an am ha'aretz, but the primary mitzvah is to give to Kohanim and Levites who teach Torah. And the halakha follows the majority of the Rishonim, that the obligation is to give the priestly gifts specifically to Torah teachers, and only if there is no Torah scholar present, are they given to an am ha'aretz (Tosafot, Ramban, Rashba, Ran, Ritva, and Meiri on Chullin 130b; Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 61:7. See Peninei Halakha: Kashrut 7:3:1).

Police Officers

The members of the tribe of Levi also served as the police officers who enforced law and order in Israel (I Chronicles 23:1-4, 26:29). So too, in the days of Jehoshaphat:

"And the Levites, from the sons of the Kehathites and the sons of the Korachites stood up to praise Hashem, the God of Israel, with an exceedingly loud voice" (II Chronicles 20:19).

And in the days of Josiah:

"And from the Levites, scribes and officers and gatekeepers" (II Chronicles 34:13).

Our Sages also said (Sifrei Devarim 15) that the Levites were the police officers who accompanied the judges to punish sinners.

Our Sages also said:

"Originally (in the times of the First Temple), they would not appoint police officers except from the Levites, as it is stated: 'And the Levite officers before you'" (Yevamot 86b).

In the times of the Second Temple, since few Levites ascended from Babylon, the officers were from all the tribes.

Encouraging the Army and the Fighters

The tribe of Levi had another important role – to encourage the fighters of Israel. For this purpose, in addition to the High Priest who was responsible for the Temple service, they would anoint another priest with the anointing oil, called the "anointed priest for war." His role was to go out with the fighters and encourage their spirit to fight bravely (Deuteronomy 20:2-4). It was also a commandment for the priests to go out with the fighters and blow the trumpets in order to express the sanctity of the fighters' mission, as it is stated:

"And the sons of Aaron, the kohanim, shall blow the trumpets…And when you go into battle in your land against the adversary who oppresses you, you shall sound short blasts on the trumpets, and you shall be remembered before Hashem your God, and you shall be saved from your enemies" (Numbers 10:8-9).

The Military Police

Along with the words of encouragement from the anointed priest for war, the police officers would determine who would go out to battle: In an optional war, they would exempt those who planted vineyards or built homes or were newlyweds in their first year, as well as the fainthearted. In a milchemet mitzvah (a mandatory war) – that is, a defensive war against an enemy, they would not exempt any fighter except for those who were truly unable to fight. This is what our Sages said in the Mishnah:

"In a milchemet mitzvah, all go out, even a groom from his chamber and a bride from her chuppah" (Sotah 8:7).

After the war began, the officers would stand like brave heroes in order to revive those who fell in battle, and to severely punish those fleeing from the front. As the Mishnah states: "And they had iron spikes in their hands, and anyone who tried to go back (flee), the officer had permission to amputate his legs, for the beginning of fleeing leads to downfall" (Sotah 8:6). That is, if they allow soldiers who are afraid to flee, eventually all of Israel will fall to the enemy.

Rashi wrote:

"And I found in the Talmud Yerushalmi (quoted in other Midrashim), that when Aaron died, the Clouds of Glory departed, and the Canaanites came to wage war against Israel. And [the Jews] lost heart and wanted to return to Egypt, and they retreated eight journeys from the Mount Hor to Moseroth…And the sons of Levi pursued them to return them, and they killed seven families from them, and four families fell from the sons of Levi" (Rashi on Numbers 26:13).

Bearers of the Ark and the Prayers

The Priests also carried the Holy Ark that went out with the fighters to war, fulfilling what is stated:

"For Hashem your God is the One who goes along with you, to fight for you" (Sotah 42b, Sefer Yereim 432, and others).

In parallel to the fighters going out to battle, there were Levites who stood in song and prayer on behalf of the fighting vanguard, as it is stated in the days of Jehoshaphat:

"And the Levites, of the sons of the Kehathites and of the sons of the Korahites, stood up to praise Hashem, the God of Israel, with an exceedingly loud voice…and when they began with praise and thanksgiving, Hashem set ambushes against the sons of Ammon, Moab, and the dwellers of Mount Seir who had come against Judah, and they were struck" (II Chronicles 20:19-22).

And some say that Psalm 20 "May Hashem answer you on a day of distress" was written for the Levites praying for the fighters in battle (Meiri on Sotah 42b).

The Tribe of Levi Fought on Behalf of All Israel

After the Priests and Levites fulfilled all their special roles – encouraging the fighters, military police, singers and prayers – many served as brave soldiers. And so we find that when they came to anoint David as king, the number of elite troops

"From the sons of Levi was 4,600″, and from the Priests "3,700". From Judah there were 6,800, Shimon 7,100, and Ephraim 20,800 (I Chronicles 12:25-28).

Based on all this, we can understand the words of the Rambam:

"And why did Levi not merit a portion in the Land of Israel and in its spoils along with his brothers? Because he was set apart to serve Hashem, to minister to Him, and to teach His upright ways and His righteous ordinances to the multitudes…Therefore, they were set apart from the ways of the world (they do not engage in earning a livelihood, but rather, in public service), they do not wage war like the rest of Israel, they do not inherit or acquire for themselves by their physical strength, but rather, they are the legion of Hashem, as it is stated (Deuteronomy 33:11): 'Bless, Hashem, his legions,' and He, may He be blessed, is the One who provides for them, as it is stated (ibid. v. 9): 'For they observed Your word and kept Your covenant'" (Rambam Hilchot Shemittah V'Yovel 13:12-13).

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook explained that they were spread throughout all the borders of Israel, and therefore they did not fight to conquer their own tribal portion, but rather, fought in the wars of the entire nation of Israel. Meaning, "When all of Israel goes out to war, they [the Levites] are also obligated to go out. And the war of the entire nation of Israel is also the service of Hashem, to which whoever is more dedicated to the service of Hashem is more connected than the rest of the nation."

The Rambam added that anyone who wishes to be like the tribe of Levi can dedicate themselves, but the intention is not that they are then exempt from military service – on the contrary – they become even more devoted to serving the nation and the army.

For the soldiers fighting in the Israel Defense Forces are fighting for the honor of Heaven and the honor of Israel, as the Rambam wrote about all fighters who must gird themselves with bravery:

"He should rely on the Hope of Israel and its Savior in time of distress, and know that he is waging war for the Unification of the Divine Name, and place his soul in his hand, and not fear, nor dread" (Hilchot Melachim 7:15).

Just like the Levites, who did not fight for their own tribal portion, but for the honor of Hashem, and His nation.

In Summary

The role of the Levites and Priests was to serve the public, to teach Torah, and serve as judges and police officers, for the sake of the entire nation of Israel. In this role, they had to act bravely against criminals and violent people, as well as against deserting soldiers. For this purpose, many of them had to be trained as fighters, and therefore, in times of war, they were drafted into the front lines of the most elite combat units. As was the case in the days of the Hasmoneans, when the Greeks tried to force Israel to abandon their religion, the Priests and Levites were called upon to stand up and bravely fight to guard the nation and the Land, and the Hasmonean Beit Din (Court of Jewish Law) ruled that it is a mitzvah to fight even on Shabbat, and they restored the kingdom of Israel to its place for over two hundred years, which is why we celebrate Chanukah to this day (see Ramban on Numbers 8:2).

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

Parshat Shemini: Brides and Grooms, Feasts and Fasts

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

"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 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.

Shabbat Shalom

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from: Esplanade Capital jeisenstadt-esplanadecap.com@shared1.ccsend.com
reply-to: jeisenstadt@esplanadecap.com
date: Apr 5, 2024, 12:08 AM
subject: Rabbi Reisman's Weekly Chumash Shiur

Rabbi Reisman – Parshas Shemini 5784

Topic – Last few days for Nefilas Apaim for a month. Make the most of it. Make it meaningful!

Rosh Chodesh Nissan is coming up on Tuesday. Now of course there are many things that change when Rosh Chodesh Nissan comes about. One of the main things that change is that we suddenly have an Issur to say Tachnun. We have the Zechus to say Tachnun all year round and it comes Rosh Chodesh Nissan and we have to stop. Which really means that these next couple of days are days that we should prepare ourselves. The last days that we have an opportunity to say Tachnun and to make it more meaningful.

What is Tachnun? Tachnun – Nefilas Apaim is the main part of Tachnun and what do we do by Nefilas Apaim? Ashkenazim say the 6th Perek of Tehillim. Sefardim have a custom to say Perek Chaf Hei of Tehillim. We say this by Nefilas Apaim. Both the Sefardim and Ashkenazim although they say different Kapitalach Tehillim have a Hakdama, a sentence of preparation. (רחום וְחַנּוּן חָטָאתִי לְפָנֶיךָ. ר' מָלֵא רַחֲמִים. רַחֵם עָלַי וְקַבֵּל תַּחֲנוּנָי). That is our Hakdama. Sefardim say it B'lashon Rabim, Ashkenazim B'lashon Yachid. Be that as it may, everyone says this. It is not a Posuk. It is just a Tefilla which is a Hakdama.

We already find Rabbeinu Chananel in Maseches Megillah Daf Chaf Daled mentioning B'derech Agav that (רחום וְחַנּוּן) is what we say at the beginning of Nefilas Apaim. You are supposed to be B'Nefilas Apaim already when you say the (רחום וְחַנּוּן). This is what we say in preparation. Why do we say this beforehand if the Ikkur of Nefilas Apaim is the Kappital Tehillim?

It may well be that the reason we do it is a Hachana as I just mentioned. A Davar Shebik'dusha needs Hachana. Nefilas Apaim which is a major part of the Davening needs a Hachana and that is a Tefilla (רחום וְחַנּוּן) a preparation for saying Tachanun, for saying Nefilas Apaim.

I have mentioned in the past that during Nefilas Apaim a person can add his own Bakashos. Just like in Shemoneh Esrei a person can add his Bakashos, the same thing when a person is bent down saying Nefilas Apaim he can add his own requests. This surprised many people.

I want to mention to you that this is not a surprise. It is as a matter of fact an Ikkur of Nefilas Apaim is personal Bakashos. The Tur quoting Rav Amrom Gaon, one of the first Siddurim, says and I quote, Noflim Tzibbur Al P'naihem Umevakshim Rachamim, B'shoel Kol Echad Bakashos. He says Nefilas Apaim is that you fall and say the request that you want. Therefore, Nefilas Apaim is of great significance. That is a thought for these days leading up. We don't have much left. We have Friday morning, Sunday for Shacharis and Mincha and Monday Shacharis. We have four Nefilas Apaim's left. Chap a' Rein, make it meaningful and think of the meaning of the words.

Topic – The Eclipse

There is a lot of hype about the eclipse and for us the meaning of the eclipse is to study the idea of the Molad, the idea that every month there is a Molad of the Levana and the eclipse is just a symbol of the Molad Halevana.

Chazal say that when there is a solar eclipse it is a Siman Tov L'yisrael. The moon which is a Remez to Klal Yisrael, the eclipse is the sun which is a Remez to the Umos Haolam, and that is a Siman Tov. Some people think that how can it be a Siman Tov as it is on the schedule and it is predicted? Chazal knew it is predicted. There are certain Zemanim that are Zemanim that are a Siman Tov and that is a Molad which falls at the time that it eclipses the sun.

What is the Hachana? What do you tell your children? What do Rabbeim do with Talmidim? They arrange a class to teach about the Molad. The Molad happens every month why is it only an eclipse now? Another Kasha. We are going to announce the Molad in the Shul on Shabbos when we Bentch Rosh Chodesh. Is that time exactly the time of the eclipse, adjusting for Eretz Yisrael time? Listen carefully and see if it is. Then figure out why it is not. Which of course the Rambam addresses in Hilchos Kiddush Hachodesh.

And so, I suggest you prepare, take out a Sefer called Shekel Hakodesh. Shekel Hakodesh is Rav Chaim Kanievsky's Sefer on Hilchos Kiddush Hachodesh in the Rambam, and there in the Perek that deals with the Molad learn the Perek. It is really like the Mishna Brura. Anybody can learn it. Learn it and get a Geshmak and make it significant.

So three thoughts for this week. Shemini, the idea of the 8th day of the Hachana. The ideas of Tachnun, the Hachana we do for Tachnun, and the Hachana for the eclipse by learning about the Molad. A Gutten Shabbos to one and all! Yehi Ratzon that it should Tak'e be a Siman Tov for Klal Yisrael and Acheinu Bnei Yisrael especially in Eretz Yisrael should have a Yeshua from the challenges they are facing. A Gutten Shabbos to one and all!

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https://aish.com/judaism-and-the-solar-eclipse/?src=ac

What is the deeper meaning behind this natural phenomenon?

by Rabbi Mordechai Becher

March 4, 2024

Eclipse fever is growing as many people anticipate the "Great American Eclipse" on April 8th 2024. A total solar eclipse will turn day into night across North America in a path from the southwest to the northeast.

Many Jews are even more excited, thanks to being connected historically and spiritually to the upcoming event. Judaism has always had a fascination with astronomy, because of the necessity of that science for computing the Jewish calendar and because it serves as a gateway to getting a glimpse of the wondrous nature of God, as King David wrote in Psalms, the "heavens speak of the honor of God."1

You may be surprised to find out that there are three craters on the moon named after medieval Rabbis. Zagut, is named after Rabbi Avraham Zaccutto,2 whose astronomical charts were used by Christopher Columbus.

Rabbi Levi,3 is named after Rabbi Levi ben Gershom (Gersonides) a Biblical commentator, philosopher and astronomer. Gersonides is believed to have invented an instrument to measure the azimuth of stars, called Jacob's Staff,4 and describes it in one of his books.5 He also personally observed a solar eclipse in Portugal on March 3rd 1337.6

Rabbi Levi crater

The crater, Abenezra, is named after the commentator, poet and grammarian, Abraham ibn Ezra.7

Maimonides, the great 12th century Jewish scholar and physician of Cairo, wrote his first book at the age of about 18, on the subject of astronomy and mathematics,8 and the Talmudic Sage, Samuel, was known by the monicker, Samuel of the Moon,9 because of his interest in, and knowledge of astronomy. The ancient astronomical instrument, the astrolabe,10 gets a mention in the Code of Jewish Law,11 in a discussion about the permissibility of its use on the Sabbath, and there is a possible reference to a very early telescope prototype in the Talmud (circa 500 CE). "Rabban Gamliel had a special tube through which he would look and see a distance of two thousand cubits on land, and also determine a corresponding distance of two thousand cubits at sea."12

The Jewish Calendar

The fascination of Rabbis with astronomy can be attributed, at least in part, to the Jewish calendar. The Bible references the festivals by their dates in the lunar month, but also relates the festivals to the seasons of the solar year. "And God spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be to you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you."13 This means that although Judaism uses a lunar calendar, where the beginning of the month is the new moon and the middle of the month a full moon, it adjusts ("intercalates") the calendar to synchronize both lunar and solar cycles. All this requires knowledge of astronomy and mathematics, both of which take on a religious significance in Jewish thought.14

In addition, the Rabbis of the Talmud encouraged the study of astronomy and the performance of astronomical calculations as being a mitzvah, a religious precept. "Anyone who knows how to calculate astronomical times and constellations and does not do so, the verse says about him: "They do not take notice of the work of God, and they do not see His handiwork" (Isaiah 5:12)…. From where is it derived that there is a mitzvah incumbent upon a person to calculate astronomical seasons and constellations? As it was stated: "And you shall guard and perform, for it is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations" (Deuteronomy 4:6).15

A Comprehensible Universe

Some explain that the religious duty of performing astronomical calculations is based on these calculations indicate that the world is rational and understandable to the human mind which is a strong argument for a rational and purposeful Creator, who is interested in a relationship with the human being.16 The very fact that the world can be described in logical terms, using mathematical algorithms indicates that the world is not haphazard or random. As Albert Einstein put it in a letter to a friend, "You find it surprising that I think of the comprehensibility of the world… as a miracle or eternal mystery. But surely, a priori, one should expect the world to be chaotic, not to be grasped by thought in any way."17

The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is its comprehensibility.

The pithy way to paraphrase this is, "The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is its comprehensibility." Mathematics, deductive logic and the scientific method are incredibly effective in understanding the universe. As the mathematician Morris Kline writes:

A study of mathematics and its contribution to the sciences exposes a deep question. The concepts, the broad ideas, the logical standards and method of reasoning… were fashioned by human beings. Yet with the product of his fallible mind, man has surveyed spaces too vast for his imagination to encompass; he has predicted and shown how to control radio waves which none of our senses can perceive; and he has discovered particles too small to be seen by the most powerful microscope… Some explanation of this marvelous power is called for.18"

So the prediction of the eclipse with complete accuracy and the plotting of its path of visibility are, in the words of the Talmud, a religious precept, a mitzvah, and in the words of Einstein, "a miracle, or eternal mystery.

The total solar eclipse on May 29, 1919 actually proved Einstein's theory that the mass of objects curves space and hence affects light's path through space.19 In a famous paper, three scientists, Arthur Eddington, Frank Watson Dyson, and Charles Davidson, concluded, "Thus the results of the expeditions to Sobral and Príncipe can leave little doubt that a deflection of light takes place in the neighborhood of the sun and that it is of the amount demanded by Einstein's generalized theory of relativity, as attributable to the sun's gravitational field."20

Eclipse and the Bible

A possible reference to the phenomenon of the eclipse is found in a famous Biblical passage in Genesis, "God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times—the days and the years; and they serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth.' And it was so. God made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night, and the stars."21 Rashi,22 the Biblical commentor, notes that the verse refers to the sun and moon as "the great luminaries" implying that they are equal in size, yet in the same verse refers to "the greater light" and "the lesser light."23 We know that although the moon is about 400 times smaller than the sun, it appears to us to be same size because it is also about 400 times closer to the earth, hence its apparent size is the same as the sun, thus enabling a total eclipse of the sun by the moon.24 Given these facts, some suggest that the statement, "the great luminaries" refers to the apparent size of the sun and moon, and the statements "the greater" and "the lesser" refer to the actual sizes of the sun and moon.25

Eclipses have always been somewhat frightening and awe-inspiring. As William Shakespeare wrote, "These late eclipses of the sun and moon portend no good to us."26 In a similar vein the Talmud states, "The Sages taught: When the sun is eclipsed it is a bad omen for the entire world. To what is this matter comparable? It is comparable to a king of flesh and blood who prepared a feast for his servants and placed a lantern before them to illuminate the hall. He became angry at them and said to his servant: Take the lantern from before them and seat them in darkness."27

Many commentaries on the Talmud find this statement perplexing. Since an eclipse is a natural and predictable phenomenon, how could it be a "bad omen" or an indication of sin, as the Talmud28 suggests?

One scholar concluded that the Talmud is not referring to an eclipse but rather the phrase in the Talmud "eclipse of the sun" literally, "blemish or affliction of the sun" refers to sunspots.29 Most commentaries reject this approach and understand the Talmud as referring to a solar eclipse. If so, how do they explain the idea that the natural, predictable eclipse is somehow a "bad omen"?

A Bad Omen?

The Maharal of Prague,30 the great 16th century thinker Rabbi Yehuda Loew, maintains that the Sages understood that the phenomenon is natural, but the Talmud is explaining the "reason of the reason," that is, why God created the orbits in such a way as to produce occasional eclipses. He explains that light symbolizes reality and existence, and darkness symbolizes chaos and illusion. Because God gave humanity freedom of will, He knew that sin would be inevitable and that people would often choose chaos over order, and illusion over reality. He created a system that would remind us regularly that our choices can create darkness, even at times when there should be light, and that our free will choices can create a barrier between us and the Divine light, but can also allow Divine light to be seen here.31

A note of caution; it is extremely dangerous to look directly at the sun at any time, however, usually we instinctively look away because of its brightness. During an eclipse when the moon covers most or all of the sun, the lower brightness makes it easier to look at and it is also more interesting than usual. Care should therefore be taken to use appropriate eye protection, and ideally to only view the eclipse using projection.32

However, make sure you don't miss this incredible event, something that is linked to the creation of the universe, to the Jewish calendar, to Jewish monotheism, and to Jewish history. Most importantly the eclipse is a demonstration of the power of light and darkness and a reminder of the ultimate power of human free will to obscure light but also to reveal light.

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https://oukosher.org/halacha-yomis/bracha-recited-solar-eclipse-bracha-said/#:~:text=Shulchan%20Aruch%20(OC%20227%3A1,a%20blessing%20is%20not%20recited.

Should a bracha be recited on a solar eclipse, and if so which bracha should be said?

Shulchan Aruch (OC 227:1) lists many natural events for which the bracha of 'Oseh Ma'aseh Breishis' ('He performs the acts of creation') is recited, such as lightening, thunder and great winds. However, an eclipse is not included in this list. It therefore may be presumed that a blessing is not recited. Why should this be? Isn't an eclipse an incredible and awe inspiring event, as much so as thunder and lightning?

Rav Chaim David Halevi, former Av Beis Din of Tel Aviv and Yaffo, suggests in Teshuvos Asei Licha Rav (5:7) that 'Oseh Ma'aseh Breishis' is only recited for natural events, which are part of 'Ma'aseh Breishis'. The Talmud (Sukkah 29a) states that the likui chama, sun diminutions, is a response to man's sinful behavior. It is a punishment and ominous sign. Many commentaries assume that likui chama refers to solar eclipses. As such, 'Ma'aseh Breishis' cannot be recited, since eclipses are not part of the natural sequence and order of creation.

How can an eclipse be a response to human conduct when eclipses occur at predictable points in time? See Maharal, Be'er Hagolah 6 and Aruch L'ner (Sukkah 29a).

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from: Rabbi YY Jacobson <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net>
date: Apr 4, 2024, 4:04 PM
subject: 10-7 and 9-11: Hitler, Hamas, and a Historic Diary

10-7 and 9-11: Hitler, Hamas, and a Historic Diary

G-d Wants You to Be Good, But He Also Wants You to Shine

Rabbi YY Jacobson at the Zikim beach in the south of Israel. Hamas terrorists came by boat on October 7th 2023 and murdered the Jews on the beach here.

As Israel and the Jewish people face the horrors of October 7th, 2023, I wish to share the story of a fascinating 9-11 diary (capturing a significant theme of the weekly Torah portion of Shemini). This diary can shed light on the ongoing struggle between Israel, the West, and radical Islam.

September 11, 1941: The world is swimming in Adolf Hitler's bloodbath. In a few days, the Germans will capture Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, and massacre 100,000 innocent human beings in a ravine named Babi Yar. On this day—9/11 1941—in Arlington, Virginia, the U.S. Department of Defense starts construction on its new headquarters, the Pentagon.

On the same day, a middle-aged new immigrant to the shores of the United States, Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, later to become known as the Lubavitcher Rebbe, writes an entry in his private journal concerning two traits that make for a moral and productive human being: "fins" and "scales."[1]

Nobody imagines that sixty years later, on 9/11 2001, the free world would be struck again. Radical Islamists would crash planes into the Pentagon and the Twin Towers, murdering thousands. A new era of global terror would descend on our planet.

The Journal

The idea the Lubavitcher Rebbe presented in his journal on this day is worth reflecting on today.

The Torah states in this week's portion (Parshas Shmini as well as Reah): "This may you eat of all that is in the waters: everything that has fins and scales, you may eat. But anything that has no fins and scales, you may not eat." [2] For a fish to be kosher, it needs both fins and scales.

The Talmud states a fascinating fact: "All [fish] that have scales also have fins [and are thus kosher]; but there are [fish] that have fins but do not have scales [and are thus unkosher]."[3]

"If so," asks the Talmud, "the Torah could have written only 'scales,' without having to also write 'fins?'" If a fish that has scales inevitably has fins, why is there a need for both signs? The Talmud answers: "Said Rabbi Abahu, and so it was learned in the study house of Rabbi Ishmael: "This is so that the Torah should be increased and made great." This is a strange answer. Where is the logic in presenting fins as an identifying sign for kosher fish when it is totally irrelevant and inconsequential since scaled fish inevitably have fins as well? How does this make the Torah greater?

Also, why are fins and scales the characteristics that distinguish kosher fish? What is special about these two identifying signs to deem fish suitable for Jewish consumption?

Food's Force

The Rabbis and Mystics teach that the physical attributes of fish, and of all animals, reflect their psychological and spiritual qualities. They further explain that the food a person consumes has a profound effect on his or her psyche. Therefore, when one eats the flesh of a particular creature, the "personality" of that creature affects the person in some way.

Fins and scales too embody two qualities embedded in the souls of these types of fish that are necessary for the healthy development of human character. When the Jew consumes the substance of such fish, he becomes a more "kosher" and refined human being. When he consumes fish lacking these characteristics, it may dampen some of these vital qualities.

Drive & Direction

Scales, the "armor" that shields and protects the body of the fish, represent the quality of integrity, which protects us from falling prey to the many pitfalls that life presents. A person of integrity will not deceive his customers, despite the apparent financial profits involved. He will not tell a lie to a friend, despite the short-term comfort gained by doing so. He will not cheat on his spouse despite the tremendous temptations.

Integrity means that you have absolute standards of right and wrong and that you are committed to a morality that transcends your moods and temptations. Integrity preserves and protects your life and your soul.

Fins, the wing-like organs that propel fish forward, represent ambition. A healthy sense of ambition, knowing one's strengths and wanting to utilize them in full, gives a person the impetus to traverse the turbulent sea of life and to maximize his or her G-d-given potential. It propels us to fulfill our dreams and leave our unique imprint on the world.

What Is Our Priority?

Which of these two qualities is more important to cultivate in life—fins or scales? What ought to be the main function of education? Should we concentrate primarily on providing our children with the confidence and skills necessary for them to become productive and accomplished human beings? Or ought we to focus more intensely on raising children of high moral standing, concentrating more on how they will live than on how they will make a living?

The Talmud teaches that all fish that have scales also have fins. But some fish have fins but do not have scales and are thus non-kosher. On a deeper level, this symbolizes the idea that a human being who possesses fins may still lack scales and thus remain "non-kosher." He might swim and frolic through large seas and oceans with his talent and genius, but his achievements may be corrupt, hurting others in the process. Creating ambitious and confident children does not guarantee their moral uprightness and integrity. In our times, we have seen the result of people who had fins but no scales.

On the other hand, the Talmud tells us that all fish with scales have fins. If you teach your children to approach life with truth and honesty, with an unyielding commitment to morality and decency, this child will certainly succeed and develop "fins" as well. Regardless of his or her degree of intellectual prowess, they will find the "fins" with which to advance in their learning and their achievements to make the world a more beautiful place.

To Change the World

"If so," asks the Talmud, "the Torah could have written only 'scales,' without having to also write 'fins'." On a deeper level, the Talmud is asking, why is it important to emphasize the need for fins in developing a "kosher" human being? Why does an emphasis on ambition constitute part of a moral and "kosher" education? Why not just focus on integrity and ethics?

The Talmud's answer is marvelous: "This is so that 'Torah be increased and made great.'" This means that our spiritual mission consists not only of professing integrity and morality but also of developing our full potential materially and spiritually. G-d wants us to be good; but He also wants us to be successful and shine; to utilize all of our talents and resources to transform the landscape of our planet into an abode for the Divine; to make the Torah "great and large." The light, majesty and depth of Torah must penetrate the entire world and turn it into an oasis of goodness and holiness.

Cruel Ambition; Deadly Surrender

The events of September 2001, like those of September 1941, dramatically altered our view of the world. Both ushered in a new era of violence, bloodshed, grief and terror. The first was by Nazi Germany; the second was by radical Islamists. Yet the roots of the two wars were very different: The Germans personified a culture possessing fins but no scales. Their ambitions, achievements, and love of life were impressive, yet their morality and sense of ethics were horrifically skewed. While they loved and nurtured their dogs, appreciated poetry, philosophy, and scientific advancement, they sent millions to die in gas chambers.

September 11, 2001, on the other hand, was perpetrated by people with a deep faith and commitment to the will of Allah, yet with a hatred for all progress and advancement, and a desire to destroy all who do not adhere to their dark vision of the world. They died for what they believed to be the ultimate in morality and holiness; yet their perception of G-d was horrifically skewed: theirs was a god who wanted them to die, as long as they can kill others.

People somehow delude themselves into thinking that Hamas and the people living in Gaza are two distinct entities and that Hamas took control of Gazans. They forget that Hamas does not control Gaza; rather, Gaza thinks Hamas. Hamas was elected by the people of Gaza in 2006, and more than 70 percent of Arabs living in Gaza and in the West Bank support the murders of October 7th, 2023.

Many young Muslims are being taught today to develop scales but no fins: to surrender their lives to Allah, without appreciating that G-d wants them to live, and not to die; to build the world, not destroy it, and to respect other peoples, not blow them up. To create a "kosher" world, we need scales, but we also need fins. Muslim leaders, parents and educators must begin to teach their youth to love their own lives more than they hate the lives of others.

They must discover that the love of G-d does not require a love for blood.

Israel and the Jewish people stand at the forefront of this conflict. This is not a time to back down but to stand with unwavering commitment to the sacredness of life and the fight against those who gleefully want to see us dead. With clarity, we ought to call out the evil we are facing and fight to eradicate it.

[1] Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, escaped Nazi-occupied France with his wife, via Portugal, and arrived to these shores in June 1941. This journal of the Rebbe (among many more), dated Elul 19, 5701 (equivalent to September 11, 1941) was discovered in his study after his passing in June 1994 and published in Reshimos #39, pp. 6-8. I'm sharing my exposition based on the ideas presented in the above journal. [2] Leviticus 11:9. Deuteronomy 14:9–10. – In 1941, Sep. 11 coincided with the Torah portion of Reah. [3] Niddah 51b.

Perceptions
By Rabbi Pinchas Winston
Parshas Shemini
Oh So Humbling

THERE IS A minhag for tzaddikim to fast on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, even though we normally do not fast on a Rosh Chodesh. The reason for the exception? Because it was the day that Nadav and Avihu were struck down by God for bringing a "strange fire" on the eighth day of the inauguration ceremony. Just like that one of the happiest days in Jewish history became one of the saddest.

Their deaths alone were sufficient reason for national mourning. But what made it so much more upsetting was how close we were to achieving one of the greatest feats of mankind when it happened. It is one thing to put a man on the moon, but something more fantastic to build a structure that God would be willing to dwell within. Even the Second Temple didn't achieve that.

Must it always be that way? Must we always only come close to redemption and then prevent it through some mishap? Because although the Jewish people had already left Egypt and had already received the Torah at Mt. Sinai, having God dwell in a structure, the work of their own hands, the Mishkan, was a higher level of redemption. The deaths of two great people at its inauguration greatly marred that.

The answer is, yes, that is the way redemption works, as the GR"A explains:

In the beginning, Moshiach will be revealed and after that, concealed, and the Jewish people will undergo birth pangs and great pains, as occurred during the first redemption. (Biur HaGR"A, Tikunei Zohar, Tikun 22)

For example, when Moshe Rabbeinu first came down to Egypt and spoke about redemption, the Jewish people could finally see an end to their slavery. But when Pharaoh not only ignored Moshe's demand for Jewish freedom but instead increased their slavery, the Jewish people lost all hope in going out. The next time Moshe came and spoke about impending redemption, they wouldn't even give him the time of day. They couldn't, being so broken.

Then there was the time that the Jewish people witnessed the incredible miracle of the splitting sea and the satisfying experience of seeing their enemy washed away by it. They even sang Shirah after it. But, by the end of the parsha, they found themselves defending the nation from a very humbling attack from Amalek.

And part of the confusion of the people in the Purim story emphasized in Megillas Esther, is how something good happens only to be followed by something bad. Mordechai saved the king's life and is recorded in the chronicles for having done so, and that is followed by Haman's rise to power.

In recent times we have the situation of Eretz Yisroel. Even people who did not believe that becoming an official nation in 1948 had much to do with geulah still waited to see how things would play out over time. Now they have joined so many others who are disappointed to see how bad the situation has become in Eretz Yisroel between the wars with neighbors and those within the country. Whatever steps forward we took toward redemption seemed to have been reversed through sin, wars, and politics.

God forbid. That is only the way it looks. The GR"A elsewhere says that the redemption process always goes forward, even when it looks like it is going backward. Being human, we like success to come pleasantly, or at least only with difficulties we can anticipate and plan for. Being God, success comes for us in whatever way He deems necessary for an individual or the nation.

Some of the reasons for the kind of difficulties we would rather avoid are kabbalistic and go back to before Creation, so Sheviras HaKeilim, the breaking of the vessels. But a more obvious reason is the importance of humility in any redemption process. Humility is redemption, because it frees us of the kind of ego that interferes with our ability to be who truly are, instead of who we think we need to be.

Would you pour drink into a dirty glass, especially if its residual taste would interfere with the one you want? Likewise, the light of God only flows "down" to people who are humble. The attack on the Jewish people on October 7 made different people feel different things. But the most important thing it made people feel was humility, and to the extent that it did, that is how much more ready we are for the redeeming light of God. May it finally end this exile and bring the final redemption we have been anticipating for millennia now, without further need for any of the humbling events we have experienced until now. Have an amazing Shabbos.

History is changing quickly. Prophecies are coming true. We need to know what to work on during these challenging times. Subscribe to Thirtysix.org Plus for Strategy For the End of the Days at www.thirtysix.org or write to thirtysixorgplus@thirtysix.org.

From **Allen.Klein@gmail.com**

I am posting this article from 2010 because in the Amazon Brazil, Chabad has posted amazing selection of fishes available only there, photos at the end of this article. Example Pirarucu fish weights 200 kilos

Kosher conundrums

Two men set out on a quest to collect their chains of tradition via oral, video and photographic evidence.

By GIL STERN STERN HOFFMAN

JULY 30, 2010

In the Jerusalem Talmud's tractate Ta'anit, Rabbi Hananya son of Rabbi Abahu said that there were 700 species of kosher fish and 800 species of kosher grasshoppers and an uncountable number of birds in the Land of Israel, and all of them went with the nation of Israel into the Babylonian exile and later returned with it, except for one fish called the shibuta.

For years there was a dispute about the identity of the shibuta, which the tractate Hulin suggests had a brain that tastes like pork. Some thought it was the mullet or the sturgeon until Bar-Ilan University neurology professor Ari Zivotofsky proved in a scientific journal that the shibuta was a freshwater Iraqi fish in the Euphrates River bearing the contemporary Arabic and Farsi name shabut.

Last Thursday, more than 250 people feasted on the shibuta at a special meal at Jerusalem's Eucalyptus Restaurant opposite the Old City walls, marking what was apparently the first time that the fish was eaten in the Holy Land in some 2,600 years. The fish were brought here from Turkey, where a Muslim professor who read Zivotofsky's article had obtained them for him.

What is Outbrain

The shibuta was just one of 18 courses at the "mesora dinner" cooked by renowned chef Moshe Basson and organized by Zivotofsky and Jerusalem dentist Ari Greenspan in an effort to pass along the chain of tradition of which animals, birds, fish and locusts are kosher and which are not, a quest the two Aris have been working on for the past 28 years.

The quest began when Zivotofsky and Greenspan were 18-year-old students at Yeshivat Har Etzion in Alon Shvut and were invited to study shehita, ritual slaughtering of animals. When someone newly religious asked them to slaughter a pheasant that she recalled was tasty, they found out that the world's top arbiter of Jewish law, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, had forbidden eating them, because there was no chain of tradition about what bird a pheasant really was.

Because a bird is kosher only if there is a chain of tradition called a mesora that it has always been kosher, each community had its own customs regarding whether local birds were permitted to be eaten.

Shortly after learning about Feinstein's rejection of the pheasant, the two Aris overheard a Yemenite student in the yeshiva talking about how the top rabbi of Yemenite immigrants, Yosef Kappah, had spoken that week about slaughtering that very bird, which the Talmud says should be on the table of kings.

Zivotofsky and Greenspan went to the North during the First Lebanon War and bought two pheasants, which Kappah and Greenspan slaughtered while Zivotofsky took pictures. Kappah signed a document that said he saw great rabbis slaughtering the bird in Yemen, and the chain of tradition was formally passed on.

"This was a real eye opener for us," Greenspan said in an interview at his dental office in the capital's Malha Technological Park. "We realized that now we had the mesora and the great Rabbi Moshe Feinstein didn't.

The mesora is a link in the chain and now we were a part of it."

Feinstein died before he could hear about the discovery, but his son-in-law, Rabbi Moshe Tendler, later came here and ate pheasant with Greenspan and Zivotofsky.

THE TWO ARIS realized that in an industrial food age, the old rabbis and ritual slaughterers (shohetim) who remembered which local birds and locusts were kosher were passing away. So they began interviewing these holders of tradition and collecting their chains of tradition via oral, video and photographic evidence.

"We understood that we were on the cusp of Jewish history," Greenspan said. "The Jewish state brought together old shohetim from around the Jewish world, but they were disappearing while everyone was only eating chicken. So after we made aliya, we started to visit these old men and women and learn from them."

From the pheasant, Greenspan and Zivotofsky moved on to birds like the partridge and the guinea fowl. Then they started working on locusts, controversial fish like the swordfish and then on mammals like red deer and water buffalo.

The meal Tendler attended was the first "mesora dinner" at Eucalyptus in 2002. The restaurant's location at the time had room for 70 people, but double showed up, including top rabbis from around the world, who listened to lectures about the history of each animal as they ate them.

"That meal made us realize how important what we were doing was and how much interest there was in it," Greenspan said. "It's not about an orgy of slaughtering and meat. It's about tradition and part of the experience is eating the food. All of this craziness is just to teach about the mesora."

The next mesora meals were held in New York in 2004 and Los Angeles three years later at the request of the Orthodox Union, America's top kosher certification organization. The meals were held following well-attended conferences in each city in which Zivotofsky and Greenspan presented their findings about the animals, including the shibuta, which debuted at the meal in LA.

Thursday's meal was the culmination of years of research studying the chain of tradition and months of work in obtaining the animals around the world, slaughtering them and preparing them.

For instance, after failing to find adult pheasants here, Greenspan and Zivotofsky received them from the rabbinate in Rome. After Israeli locusts being raised for the meal died a week before it due to the heat wave, Greenspan's cousin brought 250 from a research institute outside London.

Other attendees at the meal brought kingclip fish from South Africa. Water buffalo for a carpaccio dish came from a farm in the Negev and were slaughtered at Tnuva's slaughterhouse in Beit She'an. The deer was tested for disease at the Veterinary Institute in Beit Dagan.

The feast also included a pheasant and guinea fowl pastry, quail in caramel sauce, cow udder, fried locusts and shiluah haken soup. The soup commemorated the mitzva of sending away the mother bird, because it featured a fleishig egg that was extracted from a slaughtered hen inside a noodle nest in sparrow, dove and pigeon broth.

"The amount of work that goes into such a meal is incomprehensible," Greenspan said. "I'm a fulltime dentist, but this was also a full-time job. Normally you go to a restaurant, and the chef makes what you order. We had to find all the animals and provide everything for the restaurant."

The food also had to meet the highest kosher standards. To that end, Greenspan and Zivotofsky received assistance from Rabbi Shlomo Machfud, a respected and very busy Yemenite haredi arbiter, who is in charge of all Tnuva slaughtering.

When asked whether it was a problem to mix traditions of Yemenite, Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews, Greenspan noted that the top work of Jewish law, the Shulhan Aruch, says that if one community does not have the tradition on one bird, it can rely on the tradition of another.

"It's not a custom like kitniyot," Greenspan said, referring to legumes that Sephardim eat on Pessah while most Ashkenazi rabbis forbid them. "It's a function of testimony."

YET THERE ARE still controversies regarding Zivotofsky and Greenspan's efforts, with the most emotional issue being the swordfish.

For at least 350 years, the swordfish was treated as kosher and eaten by Jews in Mediterranean countries and later the US.

In 1951, Tendler ruled it unkosher, because scientists at the time thought swordfish had scales as juveniles but not as adults, and for fish to be kosher, they must have fins and scales. The Chief Rabbinate here and the Conservative Movement in the US never accepted the ruling, which created schisms.

"We have examined them on several occasions in different places and they have always had scales," said Zivotofsky, who urged participants at last Thursday's meal to consider whether to eat the fish.

At the meal, a 300-page source book was distributed, which contains Tendler's explanations and several articles and letters validating the swordfish as kosher.

One animal that was noticeably absent from the feast was the giraffe. There are many myths about why observant Jews do not eat giraffe, most notably that its neck is so long that there is a question about where to cut it or because it is considered an endangered species.

Greenspan and Zivotofsky, who dissected giraffes that died at the Ramat Gan Safari, said they knew exactly where to cut their necks, but there were other reasons why they had never slaughtered a giraffe. They have tried unsuccessfully to purchase giraffes in African countries where it is neither an endangered species nor a protected one.

The problems with giraffes include the strength of the animals, which can kill a lion with one kick; their expense; their lack of taste that is indicated by the fact that Africans do not eat them; and their sheer beauty.

"It would turn too many people off," Zivotofsky. "But at some point in the future, we still would like to."

The mesora for the giraffe could include Rabbi Sa'adya Gaon's translation of one of the permitted animals listed in the Torah as giraffe and stories about wealthy Jewish families eating giraffes at the turn of the century.

Other animals that could be eaten at future mesora meals include the kudu, a southern African antelope whose horns are used for shofarot, and peacocks, which currently lack a mesora, but there is evidence were once considered kosher. The Aris hope to find elderly Persian Jews with knowledge about the bird being slaughtered and eaten in Iran, but they fear it might be too late to find them.

Greenspan and Zivotofsky stressed that their goal was simply to maintain the mesora, not to make rare animals marketable enough to end up regular guests on Shabbat dinner plates. They both stressed that they were perfectly happy eating chicken every Friday night.

"Unfortunately, the era of finding elderly scholars from the old world has passed," Greenspan said. "That part of history is over, and we were lucky to tap into it. It was a privilege to be at the right place at the right time and that God gave us the gift to record such important information. We will continue traveling and learning and use the knowledge we gain to continue to enlighten the people of Israel."

AMAZON BRAZIL KOSHER FISH

Matrinxã (Matrisha)

Pacu (Pakoo)

Pescada

Tambaqui (Tambakey)

Tucunare (Two-canare)

Pirarucu

Aruwana

Curimata

Aracu

Piranha

Jaraqui

Sardinha

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה

ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה

אנא מלכה בת ישראל

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 Vayyikra. 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, sayingÖ"). 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, sayingÖ"). 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 yearís 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 sonsí 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 sonsí 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 sonsí with you, by a statute forever; as Hashem has commanded.

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

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

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

VI. INQUIRY

Having commanded his brother and nephews regarding the completion of the “order of the day”, Mosheh finds that they have burned the S’ir 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 Vayyikra Chapter 10, we have noted a significant number of difficulties. Here is a summary of the main questions, although some of them have ancillary inquiries which were raised above:

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

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

IX. KEDUSHAT KEHUNAH

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

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

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

KEDUSHA IN TIME:

1) The very first time kedusha appears in the Torah, it refers to time: Shabbat. Hashem completes the creation of the world after six days and then rests; He is "me-kadesh" the Shabbat. Later on, when Bnei Yisrael appear in the world, they are told that they must do the same thing: "Zakhor et yom ha-Shabbat le-kadsho" -- "Remember the Sabbath, to sanctify it."

2) Other examples of holy time are also well known: the Mo'adim (festivals), i.e., Pesah, Shavuot, Succot, Rosh Ha-Shana, and Yom Kippur are described by the Torah as "holy."

KEDUSHA IN SPACE:

1) The first space that the Torah describes as kadosh is Har Sinai: Moshe the shepherd sees the (non)-burning bush (situated at Sinai), approaches it, and is told to remove his shoes because "the ground you are standing on is 'kodesh' ground." This kedusha comes to full expression when the nation emerges from Egypt and arrives at Sinai to receive the Torah. At that time, Hashem commands the people to stay off of the mountain because it is so 'kadosh.' Even the kohanim (priests), who might consider themselves holy enough to be allowed on the mountain, are specifically prohibited from ascending because of the great kedusha of the mountain.

2) The space most often described by the Torah as kadosh is, of course, the "Mikdash" (Temple), which means "sanctum," after all. The essence of the Mikdash is kedusha.

3) One other space which the Torah describes as kadosh is the camp of Bnei Yisrael. Hashem commands that we keep the camp 'kadosh.' This is accomplished by making sure that high standards of dignified and moral behavior are upheld in the camp.

KEDUSHA IN OBJECTS (animate and inanimate):

A) Animals:
1) Bekhor: first-born animals are considered holy as a result of Hashem's killing the Egyptian firtsborn and saving the firstborn of Bnei Yisrael.

2) Korbanot: in many places in the Torah, animals which are set aside and designated to become korbanot (sacrificial offerings) are called "kodashim." This term is used by Hazal as the name for one of the six major sections of the Mishnaic corpus, the section which deals with things designated to various kadosh purposes.

B) Inanimate objects:
1) Clothing of the kohanim: the "bigdei kehuna" are constantly referred to by the Torah as the "bigdei kodesh."

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

KEDUSHA IN PEOPLE:

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

Another aspect of the kedusha of the firstborn is their (short-lived) selection as priests. Originally, the firstborn son of each family was designated to serve Hashem as a priest. This function, however, was transferred to the 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 "mamlekhet 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, whilt Devarim focuses on our being dedicated by Hashem to His service).

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

HASHEM'S HOLINESS:

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

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

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

HOLINESS AS A "SUBSTANCE":

What does "k-d-sh" mean? One possiblity 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.

KEDUSHA AND RESTRICTIONS:

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

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

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

The same is true of the Mo'adim as well. Kedusha clears a space of time by forbidding work; then the particular theme of that particular Mo'ed (not our topic here) can come in and get the attention it deserves. Kedusha is an opportunity-maker. For Yom Kippur in particular, the specific content of the day -- purification -- requires that more space, and more kinds of space, be cleared than usual. Not only is the work schedule cleared, the pleasure schedule is cleared as well. This is necessary for self-purification and Mikdash-purification to take place. So on Yom Kippur, since the day's theme calls for more setting apart than other holy days, kedusha has a bigger job than usual in clearing the necessary space.

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

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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 Pashat 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/Pekudei) detailed how it was actually built. In contrast, the first seven chapters of Sefer Vayikra explain the various korbanot the individual can (or must) bring and how the Kohanim are to offer them.

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

THE SEVEN DAY "MILUIM" CEREMONY

Let's review the primary elements of this ceremony:

1) First, Moshe must anoint the Mishkan, its vessels, the kohanim, and the "bigdei kehuna", using the "shemen ha'mishcha" oil (see 8:5-13).
2) Then, on each day three korbanot are offered:

- A CHATAT - one "par" (bull)- the blood is sprinkled on the upper section of the MIZBAYACH
- An OLAH - one "ayil" (ram)- the blood is sprinkled on the bottom of the MIZBAYACH
- The MILUIM 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 an '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' MILUIM 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 ayil 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 yitchak', 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 uncleanliness], 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'yikrvu 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 "miluim" 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'yikrvu 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.

NADAV & AVIHU's PUNISHMENT

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)

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. [See similar prohibition by Har Sinai in 19:20-3!]

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 uncleanliness).

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 "shrutzim" (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)
...ZOT TORAT HA'BHAYMA etc.

II. SEVEN DAY TUMAH - 12:1-15:33 ("tumah chamurah")
A. TUMAT YOLEDET - a mother who gave birth (12:1-8)
1. for a boy : 7+33=40
2. for a girl : 14+66=80

TAHARA - korban chatat & olah
...ZOT TORAT HA'YOLEDET etc.

B. TZARAAT HA'ADAM
TUMAH / based on inspection by the kohen
1. on one's body / 13:1-46
2. on one's "beged" (garment) /13:47-59
TAHARA / 14:1-32
1. special sprinkling, then count 7 days
2. special korban on eighth day
...ZOT TORAT ASHER BO NEGA TZARAAT etc.

C. TZARAAT HA'BAYIT / 14:33-53
TUMAH / based on inspection by kohen
1. the stones of the house itself (14:33-45)
2. secondary "tumah" (14:46-47) for one who:
a. enters the house
b. sleeps in the house
c. eats in the house
TAHARA - a special sprinkling on the house (14:48-53)
summary psukim for all types of TZARAAT (14:54-57)
...ZOT HA'TORAH L'CHOL NEGA HA'TZRAAT
... ZOT TORAT HA'TZARAAT.

D. EMISSIONS FROM THE BODY (chapter 15)
1. MALE - TUMAT ZAV - an abnormal emission of "zera"
a. he himself (15:1-4) - 7 days
b. secondary "tumah" / 1 day (15:5-12)
for one who either touches what the ZAV is sitting on, or sits on an item that the ZAV sits, and other misc. cases.
TAHARA (15:13-15)
waiting 7 days, then washing with "mayim chayim"
on 8th day a special korban
2. MALE - TUMAT KERI - a normal emission (15:16-18)
one day "tumah" (until evening)
requires washing clothing.
3. FEMALE - TUMAT NIDA - a normal flow (15:19-24)
a. she herself - seven days
b. secondary "tumah" - one day
for person or items that she touches
4. FEMALE - TUMAT ZAVA - an abnormal flow (15:25-30)
a. she herself and what she sits on - 7 days
b. secondary "tumah" for someone who touches her or something which she is sitting on.
TAHARA -
waiting seven days...
on 8th day a special korban
A FINALE and summary psukim (15:31-33)
...ZOT TORAT HA'ZAV etc.
==========

ABOUT THE OUTLINE

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHY THE INTERRUPTION?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Let's explain:

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

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

ZEHIRUT - BEING CAREFUL

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

The simplest explanation is based on our parallel between the Mishkan and Har Sinai. Just as Bnei Yisrael's encounter with God at Har Sinai required special preparation, so too man's encounter with God in the Mishkan. It would not be proper for man just to 'hop on in' whenever he feels like entering the Mishkan. Instead, each time an individual plans to offer a korban or enter the Mishkan for any other reason, he must prepare himself by making sure not to come in contact with anything which would make him TAMEY. Should for any reason he become TAMEY, he must wash his clothes and wait until the next day. Should he himself contract a major type of TUMAH such as TZARAAT or ZAV, then he must wait at least seven days and undergo a special ritual which will make him TAHOR.

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

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

An important though 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

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

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

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

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

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

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

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

E. See 11:44-45

"...v'hitkadishtem, v'yehiytem 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?