

# A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

*This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of Northwood United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam*

## PARSHAT SHEMINI

### DVAR TORAH MOSHE RABBEINU: "I MADE A MISTAKE"

Moshe made a mistake.

In Moshe's eyes Aharon and his sons should not have burned the Rosh Chodesh sin offering but should have eaten it. Aharon replied (according to Rabbi Nechemiah on Zevachim 101) that it was inappropriate for them to eat the sacrifice because they were in mourning over Nadav and Avihu, Aharon's other sons who died that day. Other sacrifices, unique to that day, were permissible to eat, but the goat of that day's standard Rosh Chodesh sacrifice needed to be burnt. Moshe accepted Aharon's explanation.

"Moshe heard this and it was good in his eyes" (Vayikra 10:20). Rashi explains: הודה ולא בוש לומר לא שמעתי. The first-glance translation is "He admitted and was not embarrassed to say 'I didn't hear (this from God)'." But, as the commentaries point out, it is not embarrassing to not know something you didn't hear. One of the characteristics of a wise man, says Pirkei Avot, is ועל מה שלא שמע אומר לא שמעתי – to acknowledge lack of knowledge.

Rather, we should explain Rashi's comment according to the Gemara (Zevachim 101), that Moshe did not try to save face by saying "I did not hear that halachah," but, rather admitted, "I heard it and forgot it." That was really embarrassing – for the receiver of the Torah to have forgotten one of the halachot about the nation's sacrifices on the day of the dedication of the Mishkan.

According to the Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 13:1) and Targum (Targum Yerushalmi Vayikra 10:20) Moshe went one step further. He made the following announcement throughout the camp: "I made a mistake about this halachah and Aharon my brother came and taught me."

The Netziv explains the reason for the announcement: to teach the sages of that and subsequent generations not to be afraid to admit a mistake, for even Moshe Rabbeinu, the greatest sage and the receiver of the Torah, forgot a halachah and admitted it publicly.

This is a lesson to learn from Moshe – total disclosure. He admitted he was wrong without making an excuse. But to do that one needs to cultivate truthfulness and humility.

Moshe's message reached the ears of at least two other truthful and humble "Moshe"s. Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (Teshuvot ha-Rambam 287) writes to the wise men of Lunel, after they challenged one of the Rambam's rulings in the laws of tzitzit, "Certainly the truth is according to your words, and based on this I have corrected my manuscript. This is correct, and you should correct your manuscript accordingly and write ..." Rabbi Moshe Sofer (Teshuvot Chatam Sofer 7:50) likewise writes, "I agree and retract what I wrote ... I made a mistake by looking into it too quickly ..." (see also Chatam Sofer Kobetz Teshuvot 65 about two other times he retracted).

## SOURCE GUIDE: AHARON'S SHAME, OUR SHAME

Aharon needed special encouragement from Moshe to offer his sacrifices on the great day of the dedication of the Mishkan and Aharon's first day as Kohen Gadol:

<p><b>1. Vayikra 9:7</b>  <b>Moshe said to Aharon: Approach the altar and do your sin offering and burnt offering, and atone for you and for the nation. Do the nation's sacrifice and atone for them as God commanded you.</b></p>	<p><b>ויקרא ט ז:</b>          וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל אַהֲרֹן קָרֵב אֶל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וַעֲשֵׂה אֶת חַטָּאתְךָ וְאֶת עֹלֹתְךָ וְכַפֵּר בְּעֶדְךָ וּבְעֵד הָעָם וַעֲשֵׂה אֶת קִרְבָּן הָעָם וְכַפֵּר בְּעֵדָם כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה'.</p>
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Rashi (quoting Torat Kohanim Shemini Mechilta Dimilium 8) comments on the special need for Aharon to be told to come close:

<p><b>2. Rashi on Vayikra 9:7</b>  <b>Approach the altar (Torat Kohanim) – For Aharon was ashamed and afraid to approach. Moshe said to him, “Why are you ashamed? For this you were chosen.”</b></p>	<p><b>רש"י על ויקרא ט ז:</b>          קרב אל המזבח - (ת"כ) שהיה אהרן בוש וירא לגשת אמר לו משה למה אתה בוש לכך נבחרת.</p>
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The Sfat Emet builds on Rashi's comment, analyzing Aharon's shame and trepidation and how it can become a positive force in our own lives. This source guide is built on the Sfat Emet's comment.

### A. Shame and Action

Aharon's shame did not cause him to shut down:

<p><b>3. Sfat Emet Shimini</b>  <b>One can learn from this that a person should be ashamed, when considering himself, but nevertheless approach the mitzvah, based on the power of the Divine command – because for this he was chosen.</b></p>	<p><b>שפת אמת פרשת שמני – שנת תרל"ז</b>          ויש ללמוד שכך צריך להיות אדם בוש מצד עצמו. ואעפ"כ יתקרב אל המצוה מכח ציווי של השי"ת שלכך נבחר.</p>
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A person is filled with shame when looking at his or her own faults, imperfections, and frail humanity. This shame and trepidation is intensified when ready to do a mitzvah – when ready to encounter Divine perfection. Who am I do approach God? Am I worthy for Divine service?

Yet God chose us to serve Him, despite our imperfections and faults.

### B. The Touchstone of Positive Shame

Aharon's shame must have been a positive trait:

<p><b>4. Sfat Emet Parshat Shimini 5637</b>  <b>For certainly his shame was appropriate. For Aharon was a tsaddik, a righteous man, and was not deficient in his character. However, this was also an aspect of his greatness, for after being told to approach, as it is written in the verse that immediately follows, he approached. This was a sign that his was a “shame of truth” (truly positive).</b></p>	<p><b>שפת אמת פרשת שמני – שנת תרל"ז</b>          כי בוודאי בושה זו הי' כראוי. כי אהרן הי' צדיק ולא הי' בו חסרון מדה. אך גם זה דבר גדול שע"י שאמר לו קרב כתיב מיד ויקרב כו'. זה סימן שהי' בושה של אמת...</p>
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The touchstone of whether a person's shame is truly positive is whether it causes him to freeze or he continues to act. Aharon immediately approached the altar. That meant that his shame was not born of an inferiority complex, a low self-image, or a wishy-washy nature. Aharon had a sense of Divine greatness and was filled with yirat Hashem, awe of God – and he realized how frail any human is when encountering the Divine. But he was also a servant of God, and realized that God has called on us to elevate ourselves and come close to Him. So Aharon immediately approached the altar despite his shame and trepidation.

<p><b>5. Sfat Emet Parshat Shimini 5637</b>  <b>To sum it up: True shame and positive worry do not bring a person to sadness and do not cause any barriers to service of God.</b></p>	<p><b>שפת אמת פרשת שמיני – שנת תרל"ז</b>          וכלל הדברים כי בושה ודאגה של אמת אינו מביא לידי עצבות ואינו מביא לשום מניעה בעבודת ה'.</p>
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Negative shame and worry leads to getting down; positive shame and worry never hamper our service of God.

### C. The Touchstone of Positive Shame

Shame actually brings to joy:

<p><b>6. Sfat Emet Parshat Shimini 5637</b>  <b>Furthermore, truly positive shame afterwards brings to joy. As it is written (Tanna Devei Eliahu Rabbah 3), "[Said King David]: I was joyous through my awe and felt awe through my joy."</b></p>	<p><b>שפת אמת פרשת שמיני – שנת תרל"ז</b>          ועוד מביא אח"כ שמחה כמ"ש שמחתי מתוך יראתי ויראתי מתוך שמחתי כו'...</p>
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With regards to our relationship with God, joy and awe, joy and fear, are not contradictory but complementary.

### Additional Sources

- The Sfat Emet dealt with the topic of Aharon's shame in a number of passages. See Sfat Emet Parshat Shemini for years 5639, 5641, 5645, and 5658.
- See the Rambam's description of the interaction between ahavah and yirah, love and fear, in Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah 2:1-2.
- Seemingly contradictory emotions and character traits are able to coexist within a person while approaching God in prayer. Rav Menachem Mendel Kasher ztl, in his chapter on prayer in the book Perakim Bemishnat Hachasidut, collects a number of such passages in Chasidic literature. Besides quoting our passage in the Sfat Emet, he brings from the Yismach Moshe, Tiferet Shlomo, Rav Tzadok Hakohen, and Rav Nachman of Breslov.

## RAV, FRIEND, & EVERY PERSON BY RABBI SHAYA KARLINSKY

What follows is Rabbi Karlinsky's presentation of the Maharal's commentary to Pirkei Avot 1:6; it is a segment of one article in his series of shiurim on the Maharal's Derech Chaim commentary (<http://www.torah.org/learning/maharal/>).

"Yehoshua ben Prachiah and Nitai HaArbeili received from them (Yossi ben Yoezer and Yossi ben Yochanan). Yehoshua said: Make for yourself a Rav (a teacher); acquire for yourself a friend; and judge every person on the positive side."

1. What is the significance of the language "*asei lecha*," make for yourself, rather than "*kach lecha*," take for yourself? (You are not making him – he is already there! You are simply accepting him as your authority.)
2. Why is there a change in verb between the Rav ("*asei*") and the friend ("*knei*," acquire, implying some kind of transactional acquisition)?
3. How do these three lessons connect together?
4. Why didn't the Tanna add "Acquire for yourself a student" since we are taught (Ta'anith 7a) "I have learned from my students more than from my teachers and peers."

After we were taught how a person is supposed to perfect his home (Avot 1:5), something to which he is closest, we are now taught how a person is supposed to perfect his relationship with other people with whom he is close. A Rav and a friend are very close to a person, although they are out of his house, and not

as closely attached to him as those who dwell in his house. The Mishnah lists them in order of closeness: one's Rav, followed by one's friend, followed by other people.

The Rav referred to in this Mishna is not one's primary Rav and final authority. Rather it is referring to one who **you** make into one of your teachers, even if on his own he may not be up to that standard. If it is someone from whom you can learn, you are being instructed to make him into one of your teachers.

The friend you are being encouraged to "acquire" is also referring to one who may not up to the standard of being considered your peer. Yet "two is better than one" (Koheleth 4:9) and you should expend the resources necessary to attach yourself to friends. The word "*knei*," acquire, is appropriate for the process of relating to friends, since each one is frequently doing a favor or providing needed resources for the other, and as such there is an element of mutual "acquisition" in their friendship. But the word "acquire" is totally inappropriate to describe how one relates to a Rav, since the student does not "own" the Rav, and the Tanna uses the word "*asei*."

Finally, the Mishna closes with the lesson not to distance yourself from a person because of an ambiguous act that you see him do. It does not add "acquire students" since it is inappropriate for a person to "acquire" students by setting himself as more important than he really is and "buying" students to come and learn from him. Man does not stand alone in this world, but is supposed to be connected with others. This Mishna is teaching us how to behave with three strata of people with whom we interact: People that are greater than us (Rav), those who are our peers (*chaver*), and those who are on a lesser level than we are (*kol adam*).

Implementing the lessons of this Mishnah grows out of love and desire to be closer to others. Rather than saying that this person is not worthy of being your Rav, a teacher for you, you make him in to your Rav. Your desire to learn from and become closer to him motivates you to do it. Rather than saying that this person is not worthy of being in your peer group, you make an effort to bring him closer to you as a friend. Finally, you don't look for reasons to distance yourself from others, but rather you look to judge them favorably, in order to remain closer to them. This is a branch of "Love of G-d." In the previous Mishna, we were taught about love of wise people, which is man's primary manifestation in this world of love of G-d. This is followed by our Mishna which teaches about loving others on lower spiritual levels, but which also emanates from a love of G-d, recognizing others as G-d's creations, and the desire to give to them and to be close to them.

**This issue is dedicated in memory of  
Chaim Leib Ben Laibel ז"ל**

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*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at [www.darchenoam.org](http://www.darchenoam.org) +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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