

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

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

PARSHAT SHEMINI

DVAR TORAH: DVAR TORAH FIRE FROM HEAVEN & KOSHER ANIMALS

Our Parshah opens with auspicious and awesome events. The Mishkan is dedicated on the first of Nisan. Fire comes down from Heaven; a cloud fills the Holy Tabernacle; Aharon blesses the people; Nadav and Avihu are consumed by fire. Then the Torah shifts topics and lists kosher and non-kosher animals. The transition seems abrupt. Why does the Torah immediately follow the dedication of the Mishkan with the laws of kashrut?

The Sforno (Harav Ovadiah Sforno זצ"ל 1475-1550, Italy) provides an answer (in his commentary on Vayikra 11:2). To understand why kashrut appears in the Torah immediately after the dedication of the Mishkan, we must understand what the Mishkan accomplished in the wake of the sin of the Golden Calf.

Before the sin of the Golden Calf, Israel had reached a level of direct connectedness with Hashem. At Mount Sinai Hashem said, "Wherever you mention My Name I will come and bless you" (Shemot 20:21), and Rashi explains: "'Bless you' – My Divine Presence will rest with you." They experienced the same kind of direct connection as we will in the end of days when Hashem says, "I will place My Divine Presence among you" (Vayikra 26:11).

But after the sin of the Golden Calf that all changed. Instead, said Hashem, "I will send an angel before you" to the Land of Israel to chase out the seven Canaanite nations, and "I will not go up with you" (Shemot 33:2-3). But Moshe worked hard at restoring the relationship between Hashem and His People. He audaciously prayed – as the Sforno (in his commentary on Shemot 33:15) paraphrases – "It would be better for us to stay in the desert than to go to the Land of Israel without Your Divine Presence among us, for that would lead to us most certainly going into exile soon after we get there."

Moshe's prayers were answered, but the pre-Golden Calf state was not totally restored. Only through the Mishkan, its vessels, its Kohanim, and their sacrifices would Israel merit the Divine Presence resting among them. That reached its crescendo on the first day of Nisan, the eighth day of the dedication process, the **יום השמיני**. Fire came down from Heaven and Hashem showed that the relationship was renewed.

Immediately after the fire descended from Heaven, says the Sforno, we were ready to begin our path towards the end of days, when the Divine Presence would be able to directly rest among us. That path began with kashrut, elevating our bodies and inner selves to become worthy of the Divine Presence. Hashem now told us what we should put inside of our bodies, what we should and should not come in contact with, and how we should conduct our intimate lives to make sure we pass on the elevation to the next generation.

The Sforno outlines the main theme of the first half of Vayikra: how to live in order to make sure the Divine Presence doesn't leave our midst. "For I am Hashem who brings you up from the land of Egypt to become your G-d" (Vayikra 11:45). Now, "Be holy," Hashem tells us. Elevate yourselves "for I Hashem am holy" and you will thereby become close to Me.

כִּי אֲנִי ה' הַמַּעֲלֶה אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְהִיֵּת לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים וְהֵייתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי (ויקרא יא:מה)

SOURCE GUIDE: HOW MANY SINS DID NADAV & AVIHU COMMIT?

Harav Yaakov Kamenetsky, זצ"ל (1891-1986) asks a simple question. Nadav and Avihu, Aharon's two oldest sons, are consumed by fire on the day of the dedication of the Mishkan. The Torah says why – they offered 'foreign fire' without any Divine command. Why, then, do Chazal attribute a long list of sins to Nadav and Avihu?

A. One Sin or Seven?

The Torah tells us clearly what Nadav and Avihu did wrong:

<p>1. Vayikra 10:1-2 (1) Nadav and Avihu, the two sons of Aharon, each took their incense pan, placed fire within it, placed upon it incense, and offered before G-d foreign fire that He had not commanded them. (2) Fire came out from before G-d and consumed them and they died before G-d.</p>	<p>ויקרא י:א-ב (א) וַיִּקְחוּ בְנֵי אֶהֱרֹן נֹדֵב וְאֶבִיהוּא אִישׁ מִחִתָּתוֹ וַיִּתְּנוּ כֶּהֵן אֵשׁ וַיִּשְׂמוּ עָלֶיהָ קִטְרֶת וַיִּקְרִיבוּ לִפְנֵי ה' אֵשׁ זָרָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוָּה אֹתָם. (ב) וַיִּצָּא אֵשׁ מִלִּפְנֵי ה' וַתֹּאכַל אוֹתָם וַיָּמָתוּ לִפְנֵי ה'.</p>
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The Torah repeats this in three other verses: Vayikra 16:1; Bamidbar 3:4; and Bamidbar 26:61. It is therefore striking that the Midrash (the biggest collection appears in Vayikra Rabbah 20:6-10) mentions at least **seven** (!) other sins they committed:

<p>2. Vayikra Rabbah 20:6 Rabbi Eliezer taught: The children of Aharon died only because they made a halachic ruling in the presence of Moshe their Rav.</p>	<p>ויקרא רבה כ:ו תני ר' אליעזר: לא מתו בניו של אהרן אלא ע"י שהורו הלכה בפני משה רבן.</p>
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Not only didn't they ask Moshe, they didn't even consult each other:

<p>3. Vayikra Rabbah 20:8 Bar Kapara quoted Rabbi Yirmiyah son of Elazar who said ... [Their punishment was for] not taking counsel with each other, as it says, "Each man took his incense pan" (Vayikra 10:1). Each man acted independently; they didn't take counsel with each other.</p>	<p>ויקרא רבה כ:ח בר קפרא בשם ר' ירמיה בן אלעזר אמר ... ועל שלא נטלו עצה זה מזה שנאמר, "איש מחתתו" (ויקרא י:א). איש מעצמו עשו, שלא נטלו עצה זה מזה.</p>
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The next passage in the Midrash adds another group of sins:

<p>4. Vayikra Rabbah 20:9 Rabbi Mani of Shab and Rabbi Yehoshua of Sichnin and Rabbi Yochanan, quoting Rabbi Levi, said: The sons of Aharon died because of four things; and death is mentioned in conjunction with all of them. [They died] for entering the Mishkan after having drunk wine ... They also entered the Mishkan without the proper garments ... What were they missing? It was the cloak ... It was because they entered the Mishkan without washing their hands and feet ... It was because they did not [try to] have children ... Abba Chanin says: It was because they did not have wives.</p>	<p>ויקרא רבה כ:ט ר' מני דשאב ורבי יהושע דסכנין ור' יוחנן בשם ר' לוי אמרו: בשביל ד' דברים מתו בני אהרן ובכולן כתיב בהם מיתה – על שהיו שתויי יין ... ועל ידי שהיו מחוסרי בגדים ... ומה היו חסרין? מעיל ... וע"י שנכנסו בלא רחיצת ידים ורגלים ... וע"י שלא היו להם בנים ... אבא חנין אומר ע"י שלא היה להם נשים ...</p>
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Rav Yaakov's question is powerful:

<p>5. Emet L'Yaakov Parshat Shemini, Vayikra 10:1 This is amazing, at first glance. Why did our Sages heap so many different and strange sins on these holy people, concerning whom Moshe said, "I (said Hashem) will be sanctified through My close ones"? Why did they desert the simple and straightforward meaning of the verse?</p>	<p>אמת ליעקב פרי שמיני, ויקרא י:א ולפלא הוא, לכאורה, אמאי גבבו חז"ל חטאים שונים ומשונים לקדושים הללו, שאמר משה רבינו עליהם "בקרובי אקדש"? ומדוע הניחו פשוטו של מקרא?</p>
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B. A String of Sins

Rav Yaakov answers by describing Chazal's thought process. They asked one central question: How was it possible that Nadav and Avihu acted improperly – offering foreign fire and incense not according to the Divine command – if Moshe and Aharon were present? Weren't Moshe and Aharon directing the activities of the dedication of the Mishkan?

The answer is that they acted improperly and ruled in matters of halachah even though their rav was present. But, Chazal continue to ask, how did they dare rule in the presence of Moshe Rabbeinu?

Chazal, at this point in their thinking, searched for the roots of Nadav and Avihu's transgression; it must have involved some kind of conceit or arrogance. But what caused it? They must have thought that Moshe's leadership was flawed and that they would have done better. He quotes the following Midrash:

<p>6. Vayikra Rabbah 20:10 The following also is a source: "He said to Moshe, 'Go up to Hashem, you, Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, and the seventy elders of Israel and bow down from afar'" (Shemot 24:1) – this teaches us that Moshe and Aharon were walking first, and Nadav and Avihu were walking behind them and all of Israel following. They (Nadav and Avihu) said, "When will these two elders die and we will rule over the congregation?" Rabbi Yudan quoted Rabbi Aibo who said: They said this to each other out loud. Rabbi Pinchas said: They thought about it in their hearts.</p>	<p>ויקרא רבה כ: ועוד מן הדא (שמות כד) וְאֶל מֹשֶׁה אָמַר עֲלֵה אֵלַי ה' [אָתָּה וְאַהֲרֹן נָדָב וְאַבִּיהוּא וְשִׁבְעִים מִזִּקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם מֵרֶחֶק] – מלמד שהיו משה ואהרן הולכין תחלה ונדב ואביהוא מהלכין אחריהן וכל ישראל אחריהן. ואומרים, "מתי ב' זקנים הללו מתים ואנו נוהגין שררה על הציבור?" ר' יודן בשם ר' איבו אמר: בפיהם אמרו זה לזה. ר' פנחס אמר: בלבם הרהרו.</p>
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They didn't, G-d forbid, just want power; they thought they would lead the generation better than Moshe and Aharon were. This, Chazal understood, had roots in conceit, as in the following Midrash:

<p>7. Vayikra Rabbah 20:10 Rabbi Levi said: They (Nadav and Avihu) were proud. Many women stayed unmarried, waiting for them. What did they say? Our father's brother is a king; our mother's brother a prince; our father is the high priest; and the two of us are next in line as priests. What woman is appropriate for us?</p>	<p>ויקרא רבה כ: ר' לוי אמר: שחצים היו. הרבה נשים היו יושבות עגונות ממתנות להם מה היו אומרים? אחי אבינו מלך אחי אמנו נשיא אבינו כהן גדול ואנו שני סגני כהונה. אי זו אשה הוגנת לנו?</p>
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The same attitude, says Rav Yaakov, was behind their drinking wine. Even if wine was not yet prohibited; and even if a joyous occasion like the dedication of the Mishkan and their induction into Kehunah might have warranted celebration and drinking some wine without getting drunk – why weren't they afraid to drink wine on a day they would serve in the Mishkan? In line with this, the following Midrash interprets a verse as referring to Nadav and Avihu's casual attitude at the Revelation on Mount Sinai:

<p>8. Vayikra Rabbah 20:10 The following source also shows this: "Hashem did not send forth His hand against the elite of Israel [even though] they (so to speak) gazed at G-d and ate and drank" (Shemot 24:11). Rabbi Pinchas said: This indicates that they were deserving of punishment (but it was postponed). "They gazed at G-d" – like a person who looks at his friend while eating and drinking.</p>	<p>ויקרא רבה כ: ועוד מן הדא "וְאֶל אֶצְיָלֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא שָׁלַח יָדוֹ וַיַּחֲזִיזוּ אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ" (שמות כד:יא). א"ר פנחס: מכאן שהיו ראויין להשלחת יד, "ויחזו את האלהים" – כאדם שמביט בחבירו מתוך מאכל ומשתה.</p>
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Chazal understood that Nadav and Avihu's sinning in Moshe's presence reflected some level of conceit or arrogance. In light of that key character flaw, Chazal were then forced to reexamine everything the Torah says about Nadav and Avihu – the command against drinking wine that follows their act, their reluctance to marry, and their casual attitude in the midst of Divine revelation. Rav Yaakov concludes with an observation: Every man has an inner point motivating all of his sins ... "Note this, for you will find often that Chazal see one theme tying together all of a person's sins."

TRUE CONTROL BY RABBI SHAYA KARLINSKY

This week, the week before Parshat Hachodesh, we read Parshat Parah, teaching us the laws of the red heifer and the purification process which was a prerequisite for bringing the Korban Pesach.

The Yerushalmi (Megillah 3:5) raises a problem with the timing of the custom. Why, asks Rabbi Chama bar Chanina, do we read Parshat Parah before Parshat Hachodesh?

Chronologically, the Mishkan was erected on Rosh Chodesh Nisan, while the Parah Adumah was first prepared on the second of Nisan. So why does Parshat Parah precede Parshat Hachodesh? Answers the Yerushalmi: "שהיא טהרתן של כל ישראל" – "Because it is the purification of the entire Jewish nation." This is a very cryptic explanation and needs clarification.

This week's parsha, Shemini, introduces the laws of tumah and taharah, ritual purity and impurity, brought about by contact with death and other inevitable natural cycles of life. Harav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch, זצ"ל, has a lengthy explanation of the rationale for such laws.

Death and inevitable physiological cycles confront man with his inability to exert real control over the processes of life and nature. Human life is not truly free. The laws requiring isolation and purification enable man to realize that as long as man is alive, there is one aspect of his life over he has true control – his moral choices, how to live the life that he has been given.

"החודש הזה לכם" – imbuing time with meaning – is given over to man. And counting time by the lunar cycle represents man's ongoing ability for growth and renewal even after a phase of regression and darkness.

The sense of the inevitability of man's choice closes off any responsibility for one's actions, and negates any possibility of change and renewal.

"זאת חקת התורה" – Parah Adumah doesn't simply inform us of the purification process for the individual. It is the prologue to the mission statement of the Jewish people. It informs the nation that every member of that nation has control over his moral life-decisions, as well as the ability to rectify, to repair, and to grow. It is with the foundation of true control and responsibility that we go into the month of Nisan, the month in which we became a nation chosen by G-d for his Divine mission.

שבת שלום ומבורך

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 +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.

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