



שמע קולנו

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Parshas Shemini פרשת שמני

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MAYIM ACHRONIM

Rabbi Michael Taubes

After describing many of the details concerning which species of animals, fish, birds, and insects are kosher and “clean” and which are not kosher and “unclean,” the Torah commands us “*V’hitkadashtem v’hiyitem kedoshim*,” teaching us that we must sanctify ourselves and remain holy (Vayikra 11;44). The Gemara in Berachos (daf 53) states that the word “*V’hitkadashtem*,” “and you shall sanctify yourselves,” is a reference to the requirement to wash for Mayim Rishonim, which is what people commonly call Netilas Yodayim, before one’s meal, while the words “*v’hiyitem kedoshim*,” “and you shall remain holy”, are a reference to the requirement to wash for what people commonly call Mayim Acharonim at the end of one’s meal. The Maharsha explains that both Mayim Rishonim (Netilas Yodayim) and Mayim Acharonim provide a person with a heightened level of Kedusha and Tahara.

The Gemara in Chulin (daf 105) indicates that whereas (washing one’s hands for) Mayim Rishonim is a Mitzvah, (washing one’s hands for) Mayim Acharonim is a *chovah*, an obligation. Rashi explains that the mitzvah discussed here is MideRabbanan, and then asserts that a *chovah* is actually a stronger, or more stringent requirement than a mitzvah; Mayim Acharonim, then, would seem to be a very important requirement. The Gemara then explains (sham amud 2) that Mayim Acharonim is indeed a *chovah* because of *melach s’domit*, a certain kind of strong salt which was commonly used at meals, but which had the ability to blind a person if it would come in contact with one’s eyes. Rashi says that because people would handle this salt at their meals, and then would perhaps touch their eyes with their fingers while the fingers still had some salt on them, they would run the risk of blinding themselves, hence the *chovah*, the obligation, to wash one’s hands at the end of the meal to avoid this danger. The Gemara in Eiruvim (daf 17) likewise documents the importance of washing one’s hands after the meal for this reason, indicating that it is required, as the Mishnah () states, even when washing before the meal may not be required.

Tosafos, commenting on the Gemara in all three of the above locations, states that today, we no longer use this *melach s’domit* which is so dangerous to the eyes, and it is therefore no longer obligatory for us to wash Mayim Acharonim. The Rosh in Berachos (perek 8, siman 6) implies, however, that the Gemara’s explanation there of the above cited Posuk in this Parsha (sham) appears to indicate that there is a requirement to wash Mayim Acharonim because of the Kedusha element, as mentioned above, which has nothing to do with the potential danger posed by this strong salt. He then asserts that actually, washing Mayim Acharonim is indeed a Mitzvah by itself, regardless of the *melach s’domit* problem, because of the Kedusha aspect suggested by this posuk. The danger posed in the time of the Gemara by this *melach s’domit* simply “upgraded” the requirement from a Mitzvah to a *chovah*. This would mean, though, that the Mitzvah to wash Mayim Acharonim would still apply today, even in the absence of *melach s’domit*. The Rosh (sham) does, however, offer an alternative explanation of the Gemara, and he then concludes, like Tosafos, that today people are not strict about Mayim Acharonim because we no longer use this *melach s’domit*. He also notes, though, as does Tosafos in Berachos (sham), that if one is sensitive and accustomed to washing after a meal to remove any stickiness or dirt from his hands before going on with one’s activities, one should certainly wash Mayim Acharonim before reciting Birchas HaMazon.

Other Rishonim, however, disagree with the view of the Tosafos in those three places (sham) and with the second explanation of the Rosh (sham), and assert that the obligation to wash Mayim Acharonim regardless of one’s circumstances remains fully in force today, even though *melach s’domit* is not a problem. The Rif in Chulin, for example (daf 37), states clearly that the Rabbanan have established Mayim Acharonim as an obligation even if one didn’t eat any salt. The Mordechai in Berachos (siman 191, daf 49) quotes from the Sefer Yereyem that not only is there a Mitzvah to wash Mayim Acharonim even without any danger from salt, but one must even make a Beracha when doing so, although he adds that other Rishonim disagree about the Beracha. The Rambam (perek 6 m’hichos berachos halacha

1) rules that whenever one eats bread (which requires the Beracha of HaMotzi), one must wash Netilas Yodayim both before and after the meal, adding 9sham halacha 2) that no Beracha is recited over washing at the end of the meal since it was instituted because of the danger referred to above, but he says that one should nonetheless be extremely careful about this. The Ra'avad, (Hasagat H'Ra'avad sham) however, agrees with those authorities who do require a Beracha, noting that since the obligation to wash both before and after the meal are derived from the same Posuk in this Parsha (sham), a Beracha should be recited for Mayim Acharonim just as it is for Netilas Yodayim. Later on, the Rambam (sham perek 7, hilchos 11,12) speaks of washing Mayim Acharonim without referring to any danger, implying that it applies today as well.

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim siman 181 se'if 1) rules that Mayim Acharonim is obligatory (a *chovah*), as the above cited statement in the Gemara in Chulin (sham amud 1) indicates. The Magen Avraham (sham bahakdamah l'siman) notes, though, that since today we have no *melach s'domit*, Mayim Acharonim is not as important an obligation as Mayim Rishonim (and hence, if one has a limited amount of water, he should use it for Mayim Rishonim). The Mishna Berurah (sham se'if katan 1) explains that actually, there are two reasons for the obligation of Mayim Acharonim: one is that one's hands are generally unclean from the meal and, based on the above Posuk in this Parsha (sham), it is inappropriate to say Birchas HaMazon with dirty hands, and the other is that there is a danger because of the *melach s'domit* which he says it still applicable because there may be other types of salt which we have today that pose the same danger as *melach s'domit*.

The Shulchan Aruch (sham se'if 4) thus rules that one must wash one's hands before Birchas HaMazon, although only up until above's one's knuckles. The Mishna Berurah (sham se'if katan 10) explains that food does not touch any higher point than that on one's hands; he then criticizes people who are indeed careful to wash Mayim Acharonim, but don't wash properly, using just a drop of water and barely wetting the finger-tips. He also notes (sham se'if katan 21) that one has to pour water onto each hand only once, and he then stresses (sham se'if katan 24) that one should not speak a word- even dvar torah- after having washed and before reciting Birchas HaMazon. The Shulchan Aruch (sham se'if 6) also rules that the person leading the Birchas HaMazon should be the first to wash Mayim Acharonim.

The Shulchan Aruch later (sham se'if 10) does, however, cite the other view as well that some people have the practice not to wash Mayim Acharonim (unless, as men-

tioned above, one is generally meticulous about washing after eating). The Mishna Berurah (sham se'if katan 22) explains that this is because we no longer have *melach s'domit*, but he adds that many Poskim are strict and still require it, and that the Mekubalim, as cited by the Magen Avraham (sham se'if katan 10) say to be especially careful with this Mitzvah. The Kaf HaChaim (sham os 1) elaborates on the Kabbalistic significance, and later (sham os 27) quotes those who caution one not to be lenient with Mayim Acharonim. It is noteworthy that the Aruch HaShulchan (sham se'if 5) asserts that when the authors of the aforementioned Tosafos in Berachos (sham), in Eiruvim (sham), and in Chulin (sham), ruled that there is no obligation today to wash Mayim Acharonim, they were looking only to justify the practice of the people in their days who weren't careful about this, but even they certainly agree that one should preferably wash Mayim Acharonim. He also writes (sham) that our salt today may indeed be similar to *melach s'domit* and thus concludes that one should be very careful with this mitzvah and urge his family members to do the same.

THE LESSON OF THE INAUGURATION

Avyeh Klein

In *Parshat Shmini*, *Perek Tet Pasuk Gimmel*, the *Torah* writes that *Bnai Yisrael* must sacrifice a goat as a *Chatat* and a calf as an *Olah*. The question that arises is why did the Jews have to bring these two animals at this specific time, right before the inauguration of the *Mishkan*?

The *Toras Kohanim* answers by saying the Jews at this time were sacrificing these specific animals as *Karbanot* in order for them to receive atonement for two specific sins. The goat was brought in order to atone for the brothers' sin in covering up the sale of *Yosef* by dipping his coat into goat's blood. The calf was brought here to atone for the sin of the golden calf. Through these *Karbanot* the Jews would be forgiven for these two sins.

This, however, leads to two further questions. The *Kli Yakar* points out that in *Pasuk Bet* when listing the *Korbanot* that *Aharon* was required to bring, although a calf is included in his list, a goat is not included. Why did *Aharon* not need atonement for the sale of *Yosef* when the rest of the Jewish nation did? In fact, the tribe of *Levi* was even more responsible for the sale of *Yosef* than most of the other tribes, as we know that *Shimon* was the instigator behind the sale and *Shimon* and *Levi* were "brothers" and similar in most ways! Rabbi Frand asks a second question on the *Toras Kohanim*. He says that it makes sense as to why the Jews needed atonement for the sin of the golden calf at this time before the inauguration of the *Mishkan*. The Jews were trying to get the *Shechinah* to live with them so they

needed forgiveness for their idolatry, but, why did the Jews need forgiveness for the sale of *Yosef* now? What does the sale of *Yosef* have to do with the *Mishkan* at all?

The answer to both of these questions is the same. When the *Toras Kohanim* said that the goat sacrificed here was brought in order to gain the Jews forgiveness for the sale of *Yosef*, he meant that the Jews needed forgiveness for the ideas and thoughts behind the sale of *Yosef*. The brothers sold *Yosef* for one reason only; jealousy. The brothers were jealous that their father had singled *Yosef* out and had given him a special coat. They were jealous that *Yaakov* seemingly cared more about *Yosef* than about any of them. As such, they sold *Yosef* and attempted to cover it up using goat's blood. At the time that the Jews are getting ready to have a permanent *Mishkan* they need to acknowledge that this type of jealousy is wrong. At this time, the *Kohanim* and *Levi'im* were being singled out to do the work in the *Mishkan* and the Jewish people could not have any feelings of jealousy towards them. This is why forgiveness for the sale of *Yosef* was needed now.

Furthermore, the reason that *Aharon* did not need to gain forgiveness for the sale of *Yosef* now is that here he is the one being singled out, and therefore the idea of him eliminating his jealous feelings does not apply. That is why he did not need to bring a goat as part of his *Karbanot*. This idea of eliminating jealousy is so fundamental to everybody as seen by the fact that the *Mishkan* could not be inaugurated without eliminating these jealous feelings first. Hopefully, we all can take this lesson of the *Mishkan* and eliminate jealousy from our lives as well.

SHEMONAH MI/ANI YODEAH

Eliezer Berger

Besides the title, it could be said that everything in this week's sedrah is reflected in the number eight.

To understand this, we need to explore the number seven in our experience of time. We know that the universe was created in seven days, that we have seven day weeks to perpetuate the former, that Shemitah is a seven-year cycle, that Sukkos and Pesach are [technically] seven days long, that marriage is celebrated for seven days, and that death is mourned for seven days. In fact, all of history is divided into seven millennia, corresponding to the seven days of Creation. There are, of course, countless other instances of the number seven throughout the Torah and its branches. Regarding time, though (which is what we are trying to understand in our sedrah), what do all of these "sevens" have in common?

When we look at some of them closely, we may notice that seven signifies a kedushah (separateness) from that which is mundane. The seventh day of the week is its

spiritual zenith, Shabbos. The agricultural seventh year is the suspension of work, ownership, debts, and servitude to facilitate recognition of God's sovereignty, called Shemitah. The seventh millennium will be the culmination of history, the era of Moshiach. The other seven-unit time periods are also meant to designate times for exceptional joy, sadness, or closeness to God.

At the same time, the seventh, culminating unit is not completely separate from the rest of its units. In fact, it relies on the first six to give it purpose and fulfillment. The spiritual explosion of Shabbos can only be set into motion by six days of physical and spiritual work, and Shabbos feeds the other days of the week, as we hint to every morning before the Shir shel Yom. Shemitah can only be meaningful if we have spent six years toiling and doing business. The nature of the era of Moshiach depends on the process of human history, and even upon our activities and accomplishments as individual Jews.

It follows logically, then, that the number eight transcends even that physical and spiritual creature called seven. The eighth "dimension" is beyond the definitions of this world, but it simultaneously permeates this world. The eighth day of Bris Milah signifies entrance into a covenant that is both beyond our experience and within every aspect of it. Shemini Atzeres enables us to internalize all seven days of Sukkos, yet it is also a separate holiday that transcends Sukkos. Shavuot, which follows seven weeks of Sefirah, takes us completely out of Mitzrayim and gives us the transcendent/ever-present Torah, but it also encompasses the entire seven-week count. The Yovel year, which follows seven cycles of Shemitah, is a complete freedom from the boundaries that were suspended every seventh year. The eighth millennium (Olam Haba) is not even found in prophecy; the union of divine and created realities is far beyond our comprehension of infinite and finite as mutually exclusive, and yet, the ultimate actualization of our observance of mitzvos is planted in the present.

With all of this on our plate, we can see why the Mishkan was inaugurated on the eighth day. As a sort of station for the Divine Presence, it involves the active participation of both physical Creation and Divine reality. It is, however, only possible to complete the Mishkan after seven days of experiential training. On the eighth day, our experience becomes transcendent.

This also makes the rest of the sedrah easier to follow. Why speak about things like permitted/forbidden foods and purity/impurity now? Well, perhaps we are being told to see the coming series of mitzvos as we have seen the Mishkan. These laws are not merely soda bans or parking tickets. Everything that we shall hear and accept whole-

heartedly upon ourselves in this and the coming weeks will be transcendent. These commandments access levels of being that we have yet to encounter or even perceive of. However, as we have learned, these mitzvos permeate our experience and infuse it with that which is divine. As the Torah says in Sefer Devarim (30:11-14) “For this commandment that I command you today is not too wondrous for you or too far away. It is not in Heaven that you should say ‘Who can go up to Heaven, get it for us, and tell it to us so that we will do it?’ And it is not across the ocean that you should say ‘Who can cross the ocean, get it for us, and tell it to us so that we will do it?’ For this thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.”

May we all be zoche to have the motivation to (re) invigorate ourselves with the Force that is both infinitely holy and lovingly close, and may this propel us through a life of Torah, mitzvos, ahavat Hashem, yiras Hashem, and the complete geulah, bimhayra biyameinu.

SOMETIMES IT IS NOT EASY

Rabbi David Hellman

After the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, the great tragedy that marred the celebration of the inauguration of the Mishkan, Moshe approaches Aharon with an incredibly difficult command. He tells him that he can't mourn the deaths of his beloved two sons in any way, so as to not diminish the rejoicing of the nation. The Torah simply describes Aharon's reaction as “And he was silent.” It sounds completely cold. Aharon doesn't move. He is stoic. But is this really what happened? Could a father witness two sons snatched from him in their youth and not feel pain? Could a father really accept it as if nothing happened? The Rashbam explains that Aharon was indeed overcome with sadness and despair. He wanted to cry, to tear his garments, to express his mourning in every way possible. However, in deference to the command of Hashem, he mustered the incredible moral strength to hold all that inside, to put on a show of calm while his heart was being torn apart. The greatness of Aharon was that he didn't let his emotions out so as not to take away from the joy of the nation on that historic day.

We learn from this event and from Aharon's super human act how we must accept the decrees of Hashem. Both in terms of the most difficult halachot as well as in terms of the most challenging life situations, we humbly bow before the decisions that come from above. However, that doesn't mean it is meant to be easy. Hashem understands that we may feel pain or confusion even though we accept His wishes and believe they are for the best, even if we cannot see how. Aharon is our model. He accepted Hashem's command, he was silent and showed no outer

expression of mourning, but inside he was crying. Inside he was struggling.

Later that same day, Moshe discovers that the Rosh Chodesh korban was burned and not eaten as expected. Once again he confronts Aharon and his sons, demanding to know why they didn't eat the korban as he had commanded them to do. He is furious, thinking that someone has even further ruined the celebration of the Mishkan's first permanent day in operation. However, Aharon responds “I am an onen. My sons' bodies have not even been buried, and you expect me to joyously eat the holy meat of the korban?” He explains to Moshe that even if Hashem commanded them to eat the special korbanot of the inauguration, they cannot eat the regular Rosh Chodesh korban. Eating the meat of sacrifices requires joy and celebration, and at that moment Aharon could not rejoice. Moshe accepts Aharon's response; Aharon is right.

From this part of the story we learn that Hashem and His Torah take into consideration our perspective and our human limitations. Hashem doesn't command the onen to push aside the sadness in his heart and somehow fill it with an unnatural happiness; He understands that an onen is not able to rejoice, and thus he cannot eat korbanot. Even if the Torah sometimes makes difficult demands, it does so knowing and understanding who we are. Moreover, in cases when it really is too difficult, when we really cannot do it, the Torah has exceptions. Sometimes the halacha changes in extreme situations. Hashem will not punish someone for that which is impossible, whether it's impossible for any person or impossible for a specific person.

On the one hand sometimes we have to accept the most challenging decrees from Hashem, in life and in halacha. However, we do so knowing that Hashem understands us, He knows our limitations, and He allows us to struggle. Hashem knows that sometimes it is not easy.

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