



# The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

## Shemini 5774

### At the Zoo

Rabbi Josh Hoffman

**T**he first half of this week's parsha deals with the eighth day of the dedication of the mishkan and the events surrounding it. This includes the sacrifices that were brought that day, the death of Nadav and Avihu, and the laws given following their deaths. The latter part of the parsha deals with the laws of kosher animals, birds and fish, and the laws of forbidden creeping things (sheratzim). At first glance, there seems to be no connection between these two sections of the parsha. However, it is reasonable to assume that there is, indeed, some connection between one part of the parsha and the other. As Rabbi Asher Ben – Zion Buchman notes in his work on the unity of the weekly sidrah, *Bedibur Echad*, the rabbis did not divide the Torah into fifty-four approximately equal sections, one to be read each Shabbos, based on length, because we find that the parshiyos vary in length from thirty verses and one hundred seventy-six. Therefore, it would seem more logical to say that the division was made on the basis of some thematic unity within each parsha. Why, then, do these laws of kashrus follow the recording of the dedication of the mishkan?

Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin, in his commentary *Aznayim Le Torah*, explains that once the Torah recorded all of the sacrifices brought at the inaugural ceremony, the laws of *karbanos* were basically completed. The Torah therefore wanted to note that the animals permitted for general consumption are more numerous than the limited number that are qualified to be used as sacrifices in the mishkan.. This explanation, however, is very technical, and one would think that a topic as important and all-pervasive in Jewish life as forbidden foods would carry a more profound message as far as its relation to the Torah section which precedes it. Rabbi Alexander Simcha Mandelbaum, in his work *Ma'makim*, which is based on the teachings of the Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Moshe Shapiro of Yerushalayim,

cites many sources to show the deleterious effects that the consumption of non-kosher animals has on a person's soul. He concludes that since the mishkan is meant to bring the divine presence down to dwell among the people, the Torah teaches us, after describing in detail the dedication of the mishkan, how to maintain God's divine presence within our daily lives, avoiding foods that prevent Him from dwelling among us. However, according to this explanation, these laws could just as well have been given at the time of the commandment to build the mishkan. I would like to offer an explanation that, on the one hand, has wider significance than the one offered by Rabbi Sorotzkin, and, at the same time, relates specifically to the moment in time at which these laws were given- after the dedication of the mishkan.

The Midrash *Tanchuma* to parshas *Shemini* relates that when God taught Moshe the laws of kosher and non-kosher animal, he held up each animal for Moshe to see, just as he brought all the animals before Adam to look at and give names to. What is the connection between Moshe's learning the laws of kashrus and Adam learning the characteristics of the animal in order to name them? Rabbi Henoah Leibowitz, in his *Chidushi HaLeiv*, explains that Adam needed to have a clear idea of the nature of the animals in order to give them their appropriate names. In a similar way, Moshe needed to have a clear idea of each animal in order to know how to apply the appropriate laws to each of them. Rabbi Leibowitz concludes that in learning Torah, clarity of understanding is of utmost importance, and one should not hesitate to put in extra effort to clarify even the small details. I believe, however, that there is a deeper significance to the reference in this midrash to God's display of the animals to Adam at the time of creation.

We have mentioned in the past the notion that the exodus from Egypt constituted a recreation of the world,

or perhaps a completion, in a spiritual sense, of the original creation of the world. This is why we find, in kabalistic sources, that the ten plagues brought upon the Egyptians corresponded to the ten sayings with which God created the world. The redemption from Egypt culminated with the giving of the Torah and the subsequent dwelling of the divine presence over the mishkan, as explained by Ramban. Thus, the dedication of the mishkan constituted the spiritual completion of the universe. This idea is reflected in the Midrash Rabbah, cited and expanded upon by Rabbi Gedaliah Shor in his Ohr Gedaliah to parshas Shmini, that God rejoiced on the eight day of the dedication of the mishkan as He rejoiced at the end of the original creation of the universe. Seen in this context, we can better appreciate the analogy between God's bringing the animals to Adam to name and His bringing them to Moshe to understand the laws of kashrus.

Ramban in his commentary to parshas Bereishis says that the creation of the universe was completed only after Adam had assigned names to the animals that were brought before him. Although Ramban goes on to explain his comment in a somewhat esoteric way, perhaps we can present it using a different approach. Harvey Cox, in his book *The Secular City*, writes that when one names something, he is redefining it, assigning it its function within his universe of discourse. Thus when God brought the animals to Adam to name, He was telling him to understand the place of the animals within his own life. Following this explanation of what happened in regard to Adam, we can perhaps go on to explain that after the completion of the mishkan, which constituted the culmination of the redemption process and the spiritual completion of the universe, there was a need to understand the function of the animal kingdom in that universe in a spiritual sense. For that reason, just as God brought the animals to Adam so that he could define their meaning

within his universe, God brought the animals before Moshe, to explain to him the way in which God wants His people to define their function within their spiritual universe.

Following our explanation of the connection between the two sections of the parsha, perhaps we can say that it also informs the comment of Rashi on the verse at the end of Shemini, "For I am God Who brings you up from the land of Egypt to be a God unto you; you shall be holy, for I am holy" (Vayikra, 11, 46). Rashi, noting the use of the word 'ma'aleh'-Who brings you up- rather than 'hamotzi'-who takes you out- cites a teaching of the house of Rabbi Yishmael, brought in the Talmud, Bava Metzia, 61 b. God tells the Jewish people, explains the Talmud, that had He not brought them out of Egypt for any other reason that they do not make themselves impure with creeping things (sheratzim), as do the other nations, it would have been sufficient cause for them to have been redeemed. Such abstention, Rashi continues, is an elevation for them, and that is why the expression 'hama'aleh' is used in the verse. This verse comes at the end of the section in Shemini that lays out for the nation which animals, birds and fish they may indulge in and which they may not. Moreover, the following two verses, the last in parshas Shemini, read, "This is the law of the animal, the bird, every living creature that swarms in the water, and for every creature that creeps on the ground; for distinguishing between the impure and the pure, and the creature that may be eaten and the creature that may not be eaten." Therefore, we can view this comment of the Talmud as referring to this entire section of the parsha. We can then understand this verse as saying that by defining the function of these various living things on the basis of God's Torah and indulging only in those that God permits to us, we are able to bring God's presence into our daily lives, and thereby realize the ultimate purpose of the redemption from Egypt.

## The Sin of Nadab and Abihu

Rabbi David Horwitz

**L**eviticus 10:1-3a (JPS translation) states:  
*Now Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, each took his fire pan, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered before the L-RD alien fire, which He had not enjoined*

*upon them. And fire came forth from the L-RD and consumed them; thus they died at the instance of the L-RD. then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the L-RD meant when He said: Through those near to Me I show Myself holy, And assert My*

*authority before all the people.” And Aaron was silent.*

Numerous explanations have been attempted through the ages regarding the specific sin of Nadab and Abihu. (Rav Menachem Mendel Kasher, *zatzal*, in his *Torah Shelema*, Parashat Shemini, Volume 28, pp. 2-10, lists many of them). Perhaps the reason each of the proponents of the various explanations rejected the others and searched for a more meaningful and a more persuasive explanation is that they were attempting to discover an interpretation that would highlight not merely a specific act of the two sons of Aaron, but a general character trait, of which the offering of an alien fire would only be an expression. The *Sifra* (Midrash Halakhah on *Sefer Va-Yiqra*) remarkably, writes that the two sons of Aaron wish to “add love to their love.” What can be meant by these enigmatic words?

Nechama Leibowitz, in her *Studies in Va-Yiqra [Leviticus]* (Hebrew version, pp. 102-04; English version, pp. 66-68), writes that this *Sifra* is the key to the approach that stresses that the sin of Nadab and Abihu was indeed not the act of bringing the fire *per se* but rather the ideological assumptions that lay behind it. The first thoroughly explicit expositors of this approach, which focused on Nadab and Abihu’s predilections vis a vis mitzvot, were Naftali Hertz Wessely (1725-1805, the author of the *Bi’ur* to *Sefer Va-Yiqra*), and Rav Samson Rafael Hirsch (1808 –1888), in his commentary on *Sefer Va-Yiqra*. According to their understanding, the sin of Nadab and Abihu lay in their religious subjectivism. That is to say, they felt that they could determine the proper manner to worship God. It did not matter, in their view, if God had not commanded them to bring the particular fire and incense that they brought. They simply wanted to worship God in that matter (out of love!) and they decided to do so!

The harsh lesson of the Torah is that such an approach is not acceptable for Judaism. God decrees not only that He should be worshipped, but how He should be worshipped as well. Nadab and Abihu had to pay for that lesson with their lives.

What was the response of Aaron, the father of Nadab and Abihu, to their deaths?

Leviticus 10:3b states: And Aaron was silent. R. Obadiah Sforno adds in his commentary (*ad loc.*): “He was

comforted by the Kiddush Hashem that occurred through their deaths.”

This philosophical notion is expressed in the mussar literature as well. For example, many people have heard the following well-known application of the Torah’s admonition against religious subjectivism that R. Haayim Shmuelevitz, *zatzal* presented. (I heard the following notion over twenty years ago in R. Hayyim Shmuelevitz’s name by R. Moshe Dimmitman) It explains the sequence of verses in Deuteronomy 4:2-4. The Torah states: You shall not add anything to what I command you or take anything away from it, but keep the commandments of the L-RD your God that I enjoin upon you. You saw with your own eyes what the L-RD did in the manner of Ba’al Pe’or; how the L-RD your God wiped out from among you every person who followed Ba’al Pe’or; but you, who held fast to the L-RD your God, are all alive today.

Verse 2, of course, is the famous prohibition of “Ba’al Tosif,” that injunction against adding mitzvot. Why, however, the proximity of that law with verse 3 and 4, which present a reminder of the idolatry of Ba’al Pe’or?

Here is where the notion of religious subjectivism comes into the picture. One can add a mitzvah out of the noblest of reasons, out of love of God, out of the desire to “add love to love,” which may indeed have been the reason for Nadab and Abihu’s action. Through the proximity of this injunction not to add mitzvot with the reminder of the horrific sin of idolatry entailed in the worship of Ba’al Pe’or, the Torah is admonishing the children of Israel not to follow the path of radical subjectivism. Because once one begins to travel down that road, once one’s own intellectual proclivities and not the divine command becomes the touchstone of religious observance, anything becomes possible, God forbid, even the heinous and deviant idolatry of Ba’al Pe’or. God, in His infinite wisdom, warned us against that incorrect path, just as He demonstrated that the service of Nadab and Abihu were unacceptable. As Rav Hirsch concludes (cited in *Studies in Va-Yiqra: English version*, p. 68), “Only by observance of the precepts of the Torah can the priest of Israel remain true to his principles.”

# Sanctuary Sobriety

Rabbi Shmuel Goldin

In the shadow of Nadav and Avihu's tragic death, God turns to their father, Aharon, and commands:  
*"Do not drink wine or intoxicating beverage, you and your sons with you, when you come into the Tent of Meeting, and you will not die; this is an eternal decree for your generations. In order to distinguish between the sacred and the profane and between the impure and the pure, and to teach the children of Israel all of the statutes that God has spoken to them through Moshe."*

While the text seems to clearly prohibit the consumption of any alcoholic beverage during the Kohen's fulfillment of his functions as priest and educator, the Talmud, after extensive debate, limits the full biblical prohibition to the ingestion of "intoxicating amounts" of wine. In further discussion, many halachists delineate additional, less severe penalties both for the consumption of other intoxicating beverages and for smaller amounts of wine. Finally, most scholars extend the requirement of sobriety during the teaching and application of the law to all teachers and not only to the Kohanim.

Moving beyond the technical aspects of the law, numerous commentaries focus on its potential motivation. The Torah's concern, they say, centers on the debilitating effects of alcohol. An individual who is inebriated to any degree will neither be able to properly execute the Sanctuary service nor appropriately engage in halachic discussion and decision making. The Torah therefore prohibits the consumption of wine as a safeguard against possible intoxication.

## Questions

Why are these commandments necessary?

Given the intricate detail of the Sanctuary service; given the clear repeated divine warnings concerning the potential consequences of error in that service; given the overwhelming specter of Nadav and Avihu's death as an apparent result of ritual deviation; given the fact that proper halachic decisions clearly require one's full faculties; why would anyone assume that these functions could be performed in a state of intoxication? Why must the Torah state the obvious?

To go one step further, if the Torah's fundamental

concern is potential error in the Sanctuary service or in halachic deliberation, why frame the prohibition as a ban upon alcoholic beverages? Why not simply reiterate a general warning that these disciplines must be approached with awe, reverence and caution?

Finally, if this law is based on the potentially debilitating effects of alcohol, why is a difference drawn in the Talmud between wine and other intoxicating beverages? Shouldn't all substances that could potentially lead to inebriation be equally prohibited?

## Approaches

**A.** An astute observation made by a museum guide during one of my first trips to Israel can help us frame an answer to these questions.

"You can deduce," he said, "common practice within a society from the legal edicts enacted by its government."

"Centuries from now," he continued to explain, "when the ruins of this museum are excavated, archaeologists will not find signs in the rubble stating 'No bicycle riding.' Since it is not current common practice in our day to ride bicycles through museums, legal postings prohibiting such behavior are not necessary and will not be part of the archaeological record.

"Excavators will, however, find 'No smoking' signs. This discovery will lead them to correctly surmise that smoking was likely to occur in public buildings during the twentieth to twenty-first centuries and that the administrators of this museum moved to prevent such activity."

**B.** This comment may well shed light on the Torah's concern for the sobriety of the Kohanim.

God finds it necessary to prohibit the consumption of wine during ritual and intellectual religious activity in response to "common practice" of the time.

The use of alcohol and other psychoactive drugs was an integral component of the religious rites of many ancient cultures. Rather than viewing inebriation and similar "escapist" behaviors as impediments to spiritual search, these societies considered the use of psychoactive substances an essential prerequisite of that very search.

Archaeological evidence, in fact, traces the use of

psychoactive drugs in every age and on every continent from prehistoric times to the present. In modern times, the term entheogen (meaning literally “generating the divine within”) has been coined to refer to vision-producing drugs taken to bring on a spiritual experience. The use of such substances, many have believed across the ages, enables man to loosen the shackles of his earthly existence and truly encounter the Divine.

In direct opposition to this approach, normative Judaism preaches an “earthly” encounter with our Creator. As we have consistently seen, one of the Torah’s primary messages is that God is to be found and experienced in this world, with our feet firmly planted on the ground. The Sforno maintains that Moshe, our greatest prophet, achieved his greatness specifically because of his ability to relate to God without relinquishing his physical senses.

The ban on alcoholic consumption in specific settings, therefore, does not emerge solely from apprehension over alcohol’s potentially debilitating effects. A much more fundamental philosophical issue is reflected in this prohibition.

God’s message to His people is once again clear: I am not to be found in the mists at the summit of Sinai. I am not to be encountered in esoteric visions or “out of body” experiences. You are to find Me in your world through

performance of My mitzvot, through the sober study, application and living of My law.

C. We can now also understand, as well, the distinction made in the law between wine and other intoxicating substances. Wine, even more than other psychoactive materials, has long occupied a particular place in religious ritual. This fact is evidenced at both extremes within Jewish law. On the one hand, because of the unique status of wine in pagan culture, the Torah mandates the prohibition of yayin nesech (wine that has been used for idolatrous purposes and is, therefore, prohibited to all Jews at all times). On the other hand, wine, in moderation, finds its positive place within Jewish practice, used to mark special occasions and events.

Had the Torah’s only concern been for potential error on the part of the Kohanim, all intoxicating beverages would have been treated equally. By singling wine out for special attention, however, the Torah communicates that there is more to this prohibition than meets the eye. Wine used properly and in moderation, the Torah teaches, like all of God’s physical creations, enhances our appreciation of the Divine. When used to escape reality, however, all psychoactive substances undermine our spiritual search, which is predicated on creating a union in our lives between heaven and earth.

## Fire: Holy and Unholy

*Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks*

**T**he shock is immense. For several weeks and many chapters – the longest prelude in the Torah – we have read of the preparations for the moment at which G-d would bring His presence to rest in the midst of the people. Five sedrot (Terumah, Tetzaveh, Ki Tissa, Vayakhel and Pekudei) describe the instructions for building the sanctuary. Two (Vayikra, Tzav) detail the sacrificial offerings to be brought there. All is now ready. For seven days the priests (Aaron and his sons) are consecrated into office. Now comes the eighth day when the service of the mishkan will begin. The entire people have played their part in constructing what will become the visible home of the Divine presence on earth. With a simple, moving verse the drama reaches its climax: “Moses

and Aaron went into the Tent of Meeting and when they came out, they blessed the people. G-d’s glory was then revealed to all the people.”

Just as we think the narrative has reached closure, a terrifying scene takes place:

*Aaron’s sons, Nadav and Avihu, took their censers, put fire into them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before G-d, which He had not instructed them to offer. Fire came forth from before G-d, and it consumed them so that they died before G-d. Moses then said to Aaron: “This is what G-d spoke of when he said: Among those who approach Me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honoured.” (10:1-3)*

Celebration turned to tragedy. The two eldest sons

of Aaron die. The sages and commentators offer many explanations. Nadav and Avihu died because: they entered the holy of holies; they were not wearing the requisite clothes; they took fire from the kitchen, not the altar; they did not consult Moses and Aaron; nor did they consult one another. According to some they were guilty of hubris. They were impatient to assume leadership roles themselves; and they did not marry, considering themselves above such things. Yet others see their deaths as delayed punishment for an earlier sin, when, at Mount Sinai they “ate and drank” in the presence of G-d (Ex. 24: 9-11).

These interpretations represent close readings of the four places in the Torah which Nadav and Avihu’s death is mentioned (Lev. 10:2, 16: 1, Num. 3: 4, 26: 61), as well as the reference to their presence on Mount Sinai. Each is a profound meditation on the dangers of over-enthusiasm in the religious life. However, the simplest explanation is the one explicit in the Torah itself. Nadav and Avihu died because they offered unauthorized (literally “strange”) fire – meaning “that which was not commanded.” To understand the significance of this we must go back to first principles and remind ourselves of the meaning of kadosh, “holy”, and thus of mikdash as the home of the holy.

The holy is that segment of time and space G-d has reserved for His presence. Creation involves concealment. The word *olam*, universe, is semantically linked to the word *neelam*, “hidden”. To give mankind some of His own creative powers – the use of language to think, communicate, understand, imagine alternative futures and choose between them – G-d must do more than create *homo sapiens*. He must efface Himself (what the kabbalists called *tzimtzum*) to create space for human action. No single act more profoundly indicates the love and generosity implicit in creation. G-d as we encounter Him in the Torah is like a parent who knows He must hold back, let go, refrain from intervening, if his children are to become responsible and mature.

But there is a limit. To efface himself entirely would be equivalent to abandoning the world, deserting his own children. That, G-d may not and will not do. How then does G-d leave a trace of his presence on earth?

The biblical answer is not philosophical. A philosophical answer (I am thinking here of the mainstream of Western philosophy, beginning in antiquity with Plato, in modernity with Descartes) would be one that applies universally – i.e. at all times, in all places. But there is no answer that applies to all times and places. That is why

philosophy cannot and never will understand the apparent contradiction between divine creation and human freewill, or between divine presence and the empirical world in which we reflect, choose and act.

Jewish thought is counter-philosophical. It insists that truths are embodied precisely in particular times and places. There are holy times (the seventh day, seventh month, seventh year, and the end of seven septennial cycles, the jubilee). There are holy people (the children of Israel as a whole; within them, the Levi’im, and within them the Cohanim). And there is holy space (eventually, Israel; within that, Jerusalem; within that the Temple; in the desert, they were the *mishkan*, the holy, and the holy of holies).

The holy is that point of time and space in which the presence of G-d is encountered by *tzimtzum* – self-renunciation – on the part of mankind. Just as G-d makes space for man by an act of self-limitation, so man makes space for G-d by an act of self-limitation. The holy is where G-d is experienced as absolute presence. Not accidentally but essentially, this can only take place through the total renunciation of human will and initiative. That is not because G-d does not value human will and initiative. To the contrary: G-d has empowered mankind to use them to become His “partners in the work of creation”.

However, to be true to G-d’s purposes, there must be times and places at which humanity experiences the reality of the divine. Those times and places require absolute obedience. The most fundamental mistake – the mistake of Nadav and Avihu – is to take the powers that belong to man’s encounter with the world, and apply them to man’s encounter with the Divine. Had Nadav and Avihu used their own initiative to fight evil and injustice they would have been heroes. Because they used their own initiative in the arena of the holy, they erred. They asserted their own presence in the absolute presence of G-d. That is a contradiction in terms. That is why they died.

We err if we think of G-d as capricious, jealous, angry – a myth spread by early Christianity in an attempt to define itself as the religion of love, superseding the cruel/harsh/retributive G-d of the “Old Testament”. When the Torah itself uses such language it “speaks in the language of humanity” – that is to say, in terms people will understand.

In truth, Tenakh is a love story through and through – the passionate love of the Creator for His creatures, that survives all the disappointments and betrayals of human history. G-d needs us to encounter Him, not because He needs mankind but because we need Him. If civilization is

to be guided by love, justice, and respect for the integrity of creation as such, there must be moments in which we leave the “I” behind and encounter the fullness of being in all its glory. That is the function of the holy – the point at which “I am” is silent in the overwhelming presence of “There is”. That is what Nadav and Avihu forgot – that to enter holy space or time requires ontological humility, the total renunciation of human initiative and desire.

The significance of this fact cannot be over-estimated. When we confuse G-d’s will with our will, we turn the holy (the source of life) into something unholy and a source of death. The classic example of this is “holy war” – investing imperialism (the desire to rule over other people) with the cloak of sanctity as if conquest and forced conversion were G-d’s will. The story of Nadav and Avihu reminds us yet again of the warning first spelled out in the days of Cain and Abel. The first act of worship led to the first murder. Like nuclear fission, worship generates power, which can be benign but can also be profoundly dangerous.

## Aharon’s Silence

*Rabbi Meir Goldwicht*

**T**he deaths of Aharon HaKohein’s sons, Nadav and Avihu, who offered a foreign fire which Hashem had not commanded, appear in the Torah four times. Certainly the Torah wishes us to contemplate this episode and to analyze it in depth, as this parasha is essentially relevant to every one of us. We will attempt, in the course of this dvar Torah, to understand this episode from the perspective of the father, Aharon HaKohein, who lost his two sons, Nadav and Avihu.

Aharon’s reaction to the deaths of his sons, the Torah tells us, is silence: “vayidom Aharon” (VaYikra 10:3). The midrash (quoted in the Torah Shleimah footnote 24) explains: “The Torah didn’t say ‘vayishtok Aharon,’ which would indicate refraining from speaking and crying, but ‘vayidom Aharon,’ indicating emotional calm and spiritual tranquility. How are we to understand Aharon’s spiritual tranquility despite the deaths of two of his sons?

Immediately after the Torah informs us of Aharon’s reaction, the Torah says that Hashem taught Aharon the law that a kohein may not drink wine when he comes to perform the Avodah. Rashi explains that this was Aharon’s reward for his silence. In other words, according to Rashi,

The episode of Nadav and Avihu is written in three kinds of fire. First there is the fire from heaven:

*Fire came forth from before G-d and consumed the burnt offering . . . (9: 24)*

This was the fire of favour, consummating the service of the sanctuary. Then came the “unauthorized fire” offered by the two sons.

*Aaron’s sons, Nadav and Avihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before G-d, which He had not instructed them to offer. (10:1)*

Then there was the counter-fire from heaven:

*Fire came forth from before G-d, and it consumed them so that they died before G-d. (10:2)*

The message is simple and deadly serious: Religion is not what the European Enlightenment thought it would become: mute, marginal and mild. It is fire – and like fire, it warms but it also burns. And we are the guardians of the flame.

HaKadosh Baruch Hu gave Aharon special chizuk for his reaction to his sons’ deaths by speaking to Aharon alone and not, as He usually did, by speaking to Moshe and Aharon together or to Moshe alone. The question that arises, however, is that the parasha which Hashem teaches Aharon basically comes to warn the kohein doing the Avodah that if he comes to the Beit HaMikdash after drinking wine, he will die! Is this the chizuk that one gives to a person who has just lost two sons? “Be careful or else you and your other two sons will die too”? What is the meaning behind Rashi’s comment that this parasha was Aharon’s reward for his silence?

These questions lead us to the topic of shtikah (silence). Shtikah generally indicates one of two things: 1) Fear, such as when a person who is yelled at remains silent; or 2) acquiescence, as in shtikah k’hoda’ah, when one person claims money from another and the latter is silent, essentially admitting that he owes the claimant money. Aharon HaKohein teaches us that shtikah can indicate something else as well. We can understand this third type of shtikah from the following gemara: When HaKadosh Baruch Hu showed Moshe Rabbeinu the true

greatness of R' Akiva, Moshe Rabbeinu asked HaKadosh Baruch Hu, "If You have such a great person, why don't You give the Torah through him?" Hakadosh Baruch Hu responded, "Shtok, be silent!" Moshe continued, asking to see R' Akiva's reward for his Torah. HaKadosh Baruch Hu showed Moshe the markets of Rome, where R' Akiva's flesh was being weighed and sold. Moshe challenged, "This is the Torah and this is its reward?!" HaKadosh Baruch Hu again responded, "Shtok! This is what I have decided" (Menachot 29b). What kind of response is "Shtok!?" How does that answer the question? Rather, HaKadosh Baruch Hu was teaching Moshe that there are things that one can understand only if one sees the entire picture. This can only be done when one is silent, because when one speaks, one concentrates only on what he's saying, ignoring the surroundings. Shtikah allows one to evaluate his surroundings and to see the entire picture.

R' Akiva teaches us this lesson in Pirkei Avot as well: Masoret seyag laTorah, One who follows the tradition will most likely follow the Torah as well (but there is no guarantee). Ma'asrot seyag l'osher, One who gives tithes will most likely become wealthy (but, again, there is no guarantee). In his conclusion, however, R' Akiva strays from his template, teaching: Seyag lachochmah, shtikah, Silence leads one to wisdom, instead of shtikah seyag lachochmah. Unlike following tradition and giving tithes, which are like segulos, so to speak, shtikah is a guarantee for chochmah, because through shtikah one is able to perceive the entire picture.

This was the greatness of Aharon's silence. His silence doesn't represent emotional coldness, for he certainly cried over the loss of his two sons. Rather, Aharon had the ma'aloh (positive trait) of shtikah, which let him see the entire picture, enabling him to accept the deaths of his sons with tranquility and love for Hashem. This is essentially a halacha in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim §222),

which rules that one must have a tranquil frame of mind and full desire when blessing Hashem for the bad just as one has when blessing Him for the good, because when bad things happen to those who serve Hashem, they accept it with love.

One who has the ma'aloh of shtikah can discover great sodot (secrets), because the whole point of a sod is that it remains a sod. Aharon's silence demonstrated his mastery of the trait of shtikah, and thus, his unique ability to uncover sodot. As he began his career in the Beit HaMikdash, where he would be privy to the sod of Creation and to all sorts of other sodot, HaKadosh Baruch Hu warns him not to drink wine, because "Nichnas yayin yatza sod, When wine comes in, secrets come out." Yayin in gematria is the same as sod. This commandment is not a warning that Aharon may die too, but rather an emphasis of Aharon's intimacy with sod. We now understand how this parasha served as a source of chizuk to Aharon HaKohein, essentially praising him as the paradigm of "Sod Hashem li'y'reiav, Hashem shares His secrets with those who fear Him" (Tehillim 25:14).

The concept of shtikah relates to all of us. No matter how often we become angry, rightfully or otherwise, if we possess the skill of shtikah, remaining silent until we have calmed down, we will always be happy in hindsight that we did not react immediately. Shtikah has the power to prevent machloket, to prevent anger, and to allow one to see the greater picture. The ma'aloh of shtikah allows us to consider the whole situation, and to weigh our reaction with the proper balance rather than reacting impulsively. Through shtikah we arrive at chochmah. Chochmah, which allows us to see the whole picture, leads to binah, understanding one thing from another, and to da'at, incorporating our experiences into our personalities. Thus we elevate our lives, individual and communal, to new heights.