



# The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

## Shemini/Hachodesh 5784

### Which Double Standard?

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered April 5, 1975)

In our Sidra we read the strange story of Nadav and Avihu, the sons of the High Priest Aaron, who met a tragic end. It was the very day on which they and their father Aaron were consecrated to the service of the Tabernacle. It was the greatest day in the life of Aaron, as he formally began his ministry. On this day, Nadav and Avihu made some basic error in the service. They offered an אש זרה, “a strange fire,” to the Lord. As a result, they were struck dead at the altar.

It is not clear exactly what sin it is that they committed. There are many, many opinions and interpretations offered in the Rabbinic literature. As usual, this indicates that none of them has a claim on certainty.

Thus, some Rabbis were of the opinion that their sin consisted in undertaking the service while in a state of intoxication. Others maintain that they boldly entered the inner part of the Sanctuary, where entrance to them was forbidden. In one interpretation, filled with charm and a bit of whimsy, some Rabbis maintained that Nadav and Avihu were arrogant, and their arrogance expressed itself in the fact that they were bachelors by preference! They said to many of the available young ladies, “We are important people: our uncle is Moses, our maternal uncle is Prince of the Tribe; and we are assistants to the High Priest. No one is good enough for us!” Yet another interpretation has it that their arrogance expressed itself in a grab for power. They kept on saying, מתי ימותו שני הזקנים האלה ואנחנו נוהגים, שררה על הציבור, “When will these two old men – Moses and Aron – die, so that we can take over the leadership of Israel? They were guilty of over-ambitiousness. Or, another expression of arrogance was that הורו הלכה בפני רבן, they presumptuously decided the Law in the presence of their teacher Moses, a violation of the most fundamental ethics of Jewish discipleship.

Yet as we ponder these various descriptions of the wrongdoing of these two men, it occurs to us that none of

them is really that bad that it should require such a sudden and severe response by God. Capital punishment – for show-offiness? For not wanting to marry? For drinking too much? Is this not an over-reaction?

Moreover, the question is intensified by the fact that the Torah, which mentions their sin and their punishment, does not at all excoriate them or condemn their characters. On the contrary, after their death God says through Moses to Aaron, בקרובי אקדש, “through those who are close to Me, will I be sanctified.” They are called people who are “close” or “near” to God. Furthermore, in the Oral Tradition this is called מכובדי, those who are “respected” or “honored” by Me. In an interesting exchange, Moses says to Aaron, after the death of the latter’s children, “Aaron my brother; I knew all along that this House of God would somehow be sanctified by having a tragic event happen to someone beloved of God. I thought it would be either you or me. Now that it happened to Nadav and Avihu, I see שהם גדולים ממני וממך, that they are greater than you or I!”

But if so, if the sin does not seem to be so terribly dreadful, and if these two men were called close to God, honored of God, beloved of Him, greater than Moses and Aaron – then why this severe and harsh decree of death as their punishment? The question is especially pointed according to an interpretation that the “strange fire” meant an excess of religious zeal as a result of which they violated the technicalities of the service. Should one expect the punishment to be so very harsh for a mere technical oversight?

The answer is that there is a double standard at work here. There is one standard that Judaism and the Torah hold up for ordinary people, and quite another one, far more demanding and exacting, for superior people. It is based upon the premise that great achievement implies greater responsibility. Great talent leads to great obligation. A great reputation means a duty to fulfill greater expectations.

Thus, for instance, the Halakhah reflects this double standard. Certain types of behavior, although not recommended, are permitted to ordinary people. However, the scholar is denied such luxury. Thus, Maimonides (Hil. Deiot 5:11) tells us that a man who is great in scholarship of Torah and well known for piety, is in violation of the principle of “desecration of the Name of the God” if לקח לכתר ואינו נותן דמי המקח לאלתר, he does not pay his bills on time; דיבורו עם הבריות אינו בנחת, if his speech with his fellow man is not cultured and respectable; אינו מקבלן בסבר פנים יפות, he does not greet people warmly.

So, Nadav and Avihu, precisely because they were so eminent and spiritually superior, had a greater obligation to conform to the divine command and do exactly as instructed, and not even allow their religious passion to lead them to a minor deviation from the law. What in any other case would seem to be a mere technicality, was for Nadav and Avihu, because of the higher status they had to accept upon themselves, a crime of major proportions.

This double standard is applied to Jews as such by no one less than the prophet Amos (3:2) – רק אתכם ידעתי – מכל משפחות האדמה על כן פקדתי עליכם את כל עוונותיכם, “*Only you have I known (chosen) from all the families of the earth, therefore I have held against you all your sins.*” It is precisely because of our covenantal relationship with God, that we are kept to a higher standard and a higher code of behavior than other people. It is because of our chosenness that we are required to keep the Sabbath, observe the dietary laws, and live up to the 613 commandments, which other people are not required to do. This obligates us as well to a far stricter moral and ethical code. That is why Jews, with a background of millennia of such indoctrination in this kind of double standard, have become sensitized to any wrongdoing by Jews, and leave us shocked when we are aware of moral backsliding especially by religious Jews. Even the most assimilated Jew knows that “there are certain things a Jew just doesn’t do...”

This is the Jewish double standard. What makes this a noble rule, rather than an act of injustice? Because of noblesse oblige, a voluntary assumption of a higher and tougher code. It is because spiritual eminence imposes additional moral restrictions. Thus, it is a double standard that one accepts upon himself rather than upon others.

In other words, fundamentally there is a single standard of justice: חוקה אחת, one rule that applies to all, men and women, Jew and non-Jew. In deviation from this rule, there are two types of double standard. One is the noble kind, in which I accept upon myself a different standard from

the general one, one that is more demanding and more difficult.

But unfortunately, there is also the other kind of double standard. The one that is most popularly used currently, is one that reeks of hypocrisy and injustice and corruption and venality. It is the idea that there are two codes: an easier one for me, a more difficult one for you...

Take, for example, the territories that Israel conquered in 1967, when it was faced by war threats from Nasser and the Arabs. It is these territories that were at the heart of the 1973 war, and that are the focus of all the enmity and hostility today. The decision of the U.N. was that Israel may not keep them because no nation may keep “the fruits of war.” But how interesting! There is not one country of those pressing this demand on Israel, not a single nation in the entire U.N., that can say that it did not acquire territory in war! The U.S.S.R. is certainly no Zaddik – it gobbled up all the Baltic Republics during the last war. France and England became colonial powers by benefiting from “the fruits of war.” The U.S. during the last century engaged in quite a number of such wars and now keeps these territories as part of the 48 continental states. So, today the double standard is in effect: an easier one for me, a harsher one for the State of Israel.

Or take the matter of refugees. There are at maximum some 700,000 Arab refugees today. Every other refugee group, now and through history, was expected to be absorbed by its host countries. This held true for Jewish refugees from the Arab countries – which the State of Israel has forgotten to remind the world about. But since the Arab refugees can be kept as a gun leveled at Israel’s head, an exception is made. A double standard is applied. So the whole world cooperates in keeping them in refugee camps, and in not assimilating them in the host Arab countries, which are so compatible with them culturally and religiously. The victim must be – Israel.

But what about the Kurds? Why does no one care about those refugees? Why does no one care about the fact that the Kurd’s desire for independence, which is no less than that of the Palestinians, and much older, are being crushed mercilessly. No one cares. Why not? There is a callous sentence that is current in international circles: “The Kurds have no friends.” For me this is a nightmare. I think each and every one of us knows, in the very marrow of his bones, that in the crunch, in the real crunch, neither do Jews have any friends...

Iraq, which never ceases to proclaim the right of Arab refugees to return to their homes in Israel, and in the

course of so doing dissolve the Jewish State, announces a deadline for the Kurds, after which it will not allow the Kurdish refugees to return to Iraq!

The U.N., so vocal about Palestinians and their rights, is so very reticent about South Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees.

Mr. Waldheim,<sup>1</sup> who is not known for his bias in favor of Israel and Jews, will not even officially raise the issue of millions of refugees at the U.N.! Apparently, those dreadful pictures of mangled bodies of children – are not worthy enough to be mentioned at the United Nations. The double standard!

And the American doves, who were so vociferous – and properly so – when the North Vietnamese were subject to American bombs – why, oh why are they so silent when the South Vietnamese civilian populations are decimated by artillery shells made in Russia? Are Russian bombs more compassionate than American bombs?

And where are all the voices of the Left throughout the world, those voices that were so stridently and righteously indignant on so many issues – why, oh why are they so silent about the suffering of millions of men, women, and children who are willing to risk unspeakable hardships as refugees rather than live under the Viet Cong, the same Viet Cong whose flag our college radicals raised on campuses throughout the country? The double standard! But, a double standard in reverse of the one that the Torah recommends. It

1 Kurt Josef Waldheim was Secretary-General of the United Nations from 1972 to 1981 and president of Austria from 1986 to 1992.

## At the Zoo

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l

The 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 (*sherotzim*). 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,

is a despicable and reprehensible double standard.

Perhaps that is why the Torah demands that noble double standard of us Jews – so that, in some small way, we may compensate for the other and more troubling one produced so callously by so many.

R. Israel Salanter, the Mussar, once made a comment, which is the essence not only of the Musar movement but of all Judaism; “Too many people worry about their own material well-being and the other man's soul. But it should be the other way around: We should worry about our own soul and the other fellow's material welfare.”

That indeed is what Judaism is all about: the peculiarly Jewish double standard – be strict and demanding when scrutinizing your own soul and moral behavior; be generous and understanding when subjecting others to criticism. And be concerned more about the economic condition of your neighbor – helping him and sustaining him – than about your own wealth, getting and grabbing and grasping all you can.

That is what the story of Nadav and Avihu teaches us: our sacred double standard. It is something that Jews ought to be thankful for, difficult as that double standard is for us.

How did we put it during the Passover Seder, just recently concluded right after chanting the *דײנו* prayer? – על אחת כמה וכמה טובה כפולה ומכופלת למקום עלינו – it is a double good, and a twin blessing, that God has given us.

The double standard is something for which we are eternally grateful.

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based on length, because we find that the parshiyos vary in length from thirty to one hundred seventy-six verses. 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 *Oznayim LeTorah*, explains that once the Torah recorded all of the sacrifices brought at the inaugural ceremony, the laws of korbons 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 *MiMa'amakim*, 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 animals, 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 *Chidushei 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 worlds. That is why we find, in kabbalistic 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 Schorr in his *Ohr Gedaliyohu* to parshas Shemini, 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 he 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 relying on defining 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 reason other than their not making themselves impure with creeping things (*sherotzim*), 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.

## Hashem Wants Us with Our Pekelech

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed by TurboScribe.ai and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally presented at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on April 08, 2021)

At the beginning of this week’s Parsha, Moshe commands Aharon to bring all the special korbanos on yom ha-shmini. *Va-yomer el-Aharon: Kach lecha eigel ben bakar le-chatas ve-ayil le-ola*, etc. And then, Moshe says—somewhat redundantly: *Va-yomer el Aharon, krav el ha-mizbe’ach ve-aseh es chatascha ve-es olasecha. .ve-aseh es korban ha-am*. What did Moshe add to what he just told Aharon a few seconds ago about bringing these korbanos by saying: *Krav el ha-mizbe’ach*—come close to the mizbe’ach—and offer your korbanos? Rashi explains there: *Krav el ha-mizbe’ach—she-haya Aharon bosh ve-yorei la-geshes*. Aharon was hesitant. He was timid. He was afraid to bring the korbanos, and Moshe encouraged him, saying: *Lama ata bosh? Why are you hesitant and timid? Le-kach nivcharta!* And the question is, why was Aaron afraid to bring the korbanos? After all, Hashem chose him to be the Kohen Gadol.

There are two opinions about this in the Sifra, which are quoted by Ramban on this pasuk. The first interpretation is, perhaps, the simplest peshat. The midrash gives a mashal. It’s like a king who married a woman—ostensibly a commoner—who then had to serve the king. And she was timid and afraid. He was a king, and she was just a regular person. So she needed encouragement—if he picked her, obviously, she was the right person to serve the king. That’s the simple peshat. Even though, compared to us, Aharon was very great, he was still a human being. And to serve the Melech Malchei ha-M’lachim, Ha-Kodesh Baruch Hu is very intimidating.

But the second opinion in the Toras Kohanim is very fascinating. The midrash says: *Ve-yeish omrim, haya ro’eh es ha mizbe’ach ke-tavnis shor*. Aharon looked at the mizbe’ach, and it looked like an Eigel. We know that mizbe’ach had horns—like a bull or an ox. To us, it’s just a large cube with little protrusions on the corners. And yet, suddenly, those

horns on the mizbe’ach reminded Aharon of Eigel ha-zahav. And he said: I’m embarrassed and intimidated. I’m an oved avodah aarah. I’m a rasha merusha. How can I represent Klal Yisroel and bring karbonos on the mizbe’ach if I made the eigel ha-zahav? And Ramban quotes, fascinatingly, that Moshe said: No! Even though you made the Eigel ha-zahav, Hashem chose you to do this now—and you’re the right person. The Ramban quotes, acherim mifarshim, from a different place in the midrash, *she-haya Satan mareh lo kein*. That it wasn’t that Aaron just saw this on his own. Satan turned the mizbe’ach into a tzurah of an Eigel ha-zahav.

I think this is a big yesod. We’re not Aharon ha-Kohen, and we don’t live in the time of the yom ha-shmini le-miluim. But we all have a similar experience to Aharon ha-Kohen. On the one hand, he served Hashem his whole life. Why did he make the Eigel ha-zahav? Because Moshe left him in charge of the entire Jewish people and because he was a tzadik ha-dor, a Gadol ba-Torah, and a leader of Am Yisrael. So we’re all like Aharon ha-Kohen a little in that we strive for greatness, kedusha, gadlus in Torah and ma’asim tovim, and to help Klal Yisroel. And similar to Aharon ha-Kohen, sometimes we mess up and do the wrong things. We all have our failures, our mistakes, and wrongdoings that we bring with us. And sometimes, suddenly, we say to ourselves: Can I work on something big and important? Can I contribute? Can I be a role model? After all, I’m not perfect and do things wrong. And if everyone knew how many things I did wrong, how would they look at me then? And what does Ramban say here? That’s the Satan telling you that. Obviously, it’s a natural reaction, but Satan plays a part in this. That’s the yeitzer ha-ra. Sometimes it tells you how you’re so great and better than everyone else. You don’t have to care because you’re better than everyone else. And yet, there’s another yeitzer ha-ra. Satan is very clever. He knows when to use which tactic. He says: Have you ever

heard of yiras cheit? Have you read all the Mussar books about how terrible it is to do any aveira? You're no good! You shouldn't even try. Why strive for greatness? You're not going to accomplish anything. You don't deserve it because you're not good enough. And I think what Ramban says here is a very important yesod. Of course, people think this way. But you should know that it's really Satan telling you that. Obviously, we don't live in a time where Hashem sends Moshe Rabbeinu down from Har Sinai to tell us our exact role in life. None of us have access to a Navi, who speaks panim-el-panim to Hashem, to tell us exactly what job we should do in this world. But nonetheless, you should strive to accomplish and say: *le-kach nivcharta*.

Rav Moshe Feinstein has a beautiful drash, way back in parshas Va-yak'hel, that Hashem tells the Jewish people: *Re'u, karah Hashem be-shem Betzalel ben Uri ben Chur, le-mateh Yehudah*. See that Hashem specifically summoned Betzalel ben Uri ben Chur. How are they supposed to see that Hashem picked Betzalel? They're taking his word for it.

Rav Moshe Feinstein says: You see that he's talented and knows how to make beautiful things. You see how he knows how to organize, fashion things, and do all kinds of intricate work. You don't need me to tell you. That's the proof that Hashem chose him, because Hashem only gave him great abilities if he had a great tafkid to accomplish. And likewise, we all have our capabilities and talents. *Re'u, karah Hashem be-shem*. Hashem is summoning us to do our job. But it's Satan that sometimes tells us we are not good enough to do that job—that we are not perfect enough. And the answer is: I don't have to be perfect. Hashem brought me into the world and gave me my tafkid. My job is to do my best. My job is to try to do teshuva and move on from my failings and increase and enhance my spiritual successes—and not give in to Satan.

## The Power of Shame

Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Schiffman

**A**fter seven days of consecration in Parshat Tzav, Parshat Shemini opens with the eighth day, when the offering of sacrifices by Aaron will enable the Glory of God to appear. After an elongated anticipation, we would expect Aaron to be brimming with enthusiasm to fill his role as High Priest. Yet, the Sages, attuned to the subtleties of language and the complexities of the human condition, hypothesize hesitancy on Aaron's part.

Moses told Aaron "Come near to the altar and offer your sin offering and your burnt offering and make atonement

As a matter of fact, the Chidah here takes a similar approach and very intriguingly says: Aaron was bosh, not just because of the greatness of *Melech Malchei ha-M'lachim, Ha-kadosh Baruch Hu*. He was also embarrassed because of Chet ha-Eigel. And he is medayek here: Moshe says, why are you bosh? *Le-kach nivcharta!* Hashem chose you to be the Kohen Gadol davka because you sinned in the Chet ha-Eigel. And Chida quotes the famous ma'amar Chazal: *Be-makom she-ba'alei teshuva omdim aflu tzadikim gemurim einam yecholim la'amod*. Sometimes, someone is chosen not only in spite of their failings and imperfections but davka because of them. Hashem didn't create this world for the purpose of malachim serving Him. He already had that before He created Adam ha-Rishon. Hashem created this world so that we could serve Him. And everyone has their own journey. Everyone came from wherever they are coming from. And sometimes Hashem davka wants ba'alei teshuva to serve Him in a way that tzadikim gemurim can't. And the next time, Satan comes to us and tells us: Don't think you're so great, don't imagine that you can do great things and aspire to the highest levels. You have *kupah shel sheratzim*, averos, failings, and imperfections. We must stand up to Satan and remember Moshe Rabbeinu telling us: *Lama ata bosh? Le-kach nivcharta!* Obviously, it doesn't mean to keep doing aveiros. It means to be a ba'al teshuva. It means to strive to at least be on the road to the goal and the ambition of doing everything right. But once I'm on that road, once I strive to do everything right—I can say *le-kach nivcharta*, davka wherever I am. Perhaps Hashem davka wants the kind of person I am to serve him, and that's why He put me in this place and this time and gave me these talents and these abilities. *Re'u*—see—that Hashem also called me by name, and I have remarkable things to accomplish.

for yourself and the people" (Lev 9:7). Commentaries note that the opening words "*kerav el ha-mizbeach*," "come near to the altar," are seemingly extraneous. The verse could have begun with "offer your sin offering" and Aaron would have deduced that he would have "to come near to the altar" to accomplish this directive. Reading into this clue, one midrash intuits Aaron's reluctance. Moses needed to empower Aaron, urging him to "Embolden yourself and come and do your priestly activities." What exactly is causing Aaron's reticence to approach the altar?

Rashi posits two related emotions generating the resistance: shame and fear. The failures and shortcomings of the Golden Calf were ever-present in Aaron's psyche. Aaron was so haunted by the incident, according to one midrash, that he mistook the altar for the silhouette of a calf. These self-conscious emotions prevented Aaron from resolutely and energetically executing the sacrificial service.

Moses, according to Rashi, persuaded Aaron by stating "Why are you ashamed? It was for this that you were chosen." One way to interpret Rashi is that, due to the potentially paralyzing effects of these negative sentiments, Moses adjured Aaron not to feel ashamed. Alternatively, instead of denigrating shame, many Hasidic commentaries interpret Rashi's comment as endorsing this challenging emotion. It is expressly because of Aaron's deep sense of humility and hesitancy that he was chosen for this task.

In contrast to the Israelites who happily celebrated after the sin of the Golden Calf, Aaron's shame about his participation in that offense, writes Rabbi Sholom Noach Berezovsky in his *Netivot Shalom*, embodied the proper emotional expression after iniquity. It is precisely this painful penitential process that made Aaron the perfect leader to offer the inaugural sin offering. Through the experience of his own sin and internal process of repair, Aaron was able to empathize with other sinners. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks constructs the implicit message of Moses

to Aaron that only one who understands sin can pray for exoneration: "You know what sin is like. You know what it is to feel guilt. You more than anyone else understand the need for repentance and atonement. You have felt the cry of your soul to be cleansed, purified and wiped free of the stain of transgression" ("When Weakness Becomes Strength," *Covenant & Conversation*).

While also advancing the value of Aaron's shame, Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter in his *Sefat Emet* acknowledges the pitfalls of shame gone awry. The primary distinction between what Rabbi Alter deems adaptive shame and harmful shame is whether the emotion causes us to be derelict in our spiritual obligations. With Moses' support and encouragement to "come near," Aaron was able to move forward. If he would have resisted and avoided his responsibilities, the shame would have been unhealthy and unholy. Indeed, his transformative challenges actually enhanced his capacity to effect spiritual change.

Shame, in response to an honest accounting of shortcomings, has the potential to stimulate personal growth and foster wholeness. The primary technique and strategy to ensure that it does not lead to stagnation and paralysis is through *kerav*: approach, activation, and connection. When confronting our own failures, we would do well to take responsibility, seek forgiveness, and move forward toward further fulfilling our Divine mission.

## We Are Kosher-Keeping Kohanim

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

**T**he past few parshiyot detailed the rites of *korbanot* and recorded the Mishkan's weeklong dedication.

With that complete, our parshah turns to the next major theme of *Sefer Vayikra*: the rules and procedures of *tumah* and *taharah*. These passages (chapters 11-15) are essential for the kohanim, inasmuch as they govern a kohen's right to enter the Mishkan, perform sacred tasks, and consume *korbanot* and tithes.

But first, the Torah devotes 23 sentences to the lists and definitions of kosher animals, sea creatures and fowl. Why are these laws, which relate to all Jews, located in a section that deals primarily with the laws of kohanim? Ramban (commentary to *Vayikra* 11:1) offers three answers:

- The laws of *tumah* distinguish between kosher and non-kosher creatures, so the lists of animals, sea creatures and fowl relate to the overall discussion of *tumah* and *taharah*.
- Kohanim bring *korbanot* on behalf of Jews who make

mistakes in *kashrut*, and so they need to know these laws.

- Kohanim are commanded to distinguish between the sacred and the mundane, and between the *tamei* and the *tahor* (*Vayikra* 10:10). *Kashrut* is part of that exercise.

Ramban's third answer provides a powerful insight into the spiritual value of *kashrut* for kohanim and non-kohanim. Commentators identify many benefits of *kashrut*, including preserving health, avoiding idolatry associated with particular materials (i.e. blood), and isolating us from our neighbors. Ramban suggests that *kashrut* is an act of sanctification, exercising judgment and choosing our diet based not on desire, but religious commitment.

This is consistent with a point made by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch regarding the dining experience, in his work *Horeb* (#463): "The human meal, although in itself a physical function, is ennobled and elevated above other





entire eidah/assembly of Israel; and our utter and complete dependence on Hashem, our Shepherd - and each shall take a lamb (*seh*) for the fathers household.

Furthermore, the reaching out to one's neighbor to share the korban Pesach represents freedom in the truest sense, for sharing food with another person - outside of one's immediate family - is the sign of a free man. A slave saves the little food he has for himself. He does not have the physical or mental capacity to share with someone else.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the Rav zt"l, teaches, "A new fellowship was formed around the korban Pesach; a new community sprang into existence. Being together, living with each other, sharing something many possess in common was made possible by the ceremony of the korban Pesach.

"The slave suddenly realizes that the little he has saved up for himself, a single lamb, is too much for him. The slave spontaneously does something he would never have believed he was capable of doing: he knocks on the door of his neighbor, whom he had never noticed, inviting him to share the lamb with him and eat together...

## Turning Inward, Turning Outward

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

**T**he eagerly anticipated moment had finally arrived. An entire nation, three million strong, assembled in the courtyard of the newly constructed Mishkan to inaugurate the house built for Hashem. It was a gala celebration, but also a day of stressful nerves and swirling uncertainty. Had Hashem forgiven them for the grievous crime of worshipping a golden calf? Was the historical covenant, forged hundreds of years earlier, in a faraway land, still intact? It was a day tinged with excitement, anticipation, and jittery expectations. As a whirling pillar of fire landed upon the altar, the entire nation erupted in song and celebration. Triumph and vindication swept over the ecstatic audience.

Suddenly tragedy struck. Two children of Aharon, the Cohen gadol, were found dead in the Mishkan. Though they had committed only minor infractions, they were given a harsh and unforgiving sentence. All the energy and excitement of the day came to a screeching halt, as the bodies were removed from the Mishkan. Though the inaugural ceremonies were not interrupted, the mood quickly turned from celebration and joy to gloominess and sorrow. Everyone in attendance was left speechless. No words could possibly explain the shocking death of two

"The ceremony of the Passover meal, centered around the korban Pesach, aims at the emergence of the new chesed community - for chesed is the characteristic mark of the free man. The bondsman is not spiritually capable of joining the chesed community; he is too much concerned with himself, too insecure, too fearful regarding the morrow, too humiliated to think of someone else, too frightened and too meek. The birth of the chesed community - of a nation within which people unite, give things away, care for each other, share what they possess - is symbolized by the korban Pesach. G-d did not need the korban Pesach; He had no interest in the sacrifice. He simply wanted the people - slaves who had just come out of the house of bondage - to emerge from their isolation and self-centeredness into the chesed community, where the little that man has is too much for himself" (Chumash Masores HaRav, Shemos, p.86-87).

May we merit to celebrate our complete redemption and freedom this Nissan, when together in chaburos with our families, neighbors and friends, we will feast on the Korban Pesach in a rebuilt and redeemed Yerushalayim.

cohanim who were merely channeling the immense joy of this opening day of the Mishkan.

Not only was the general population dumbfounded, but Aharon, the father of the two cohanim, was stunned into silence. He had looked forward to this day for catharsis, hoping to overcome his guilt for his complicity in the egel debacle. Instead of closure, Aharon faced the crushing loss of two children. In a heroic moment of stoic submission Aharon kept silent. His steely silence is one of the most thunderous moments in the entire Torah. When Man faces perceived divine injustice, his only recourse is to guard his tongue and surrender to the divine mystery. This is Aharon's akeidah, and he doesn't come up short.

In the aftermath of this tragedy Hashem was silent, offering no explanation for the stern verdict. Though Moshe offers philosophical perspectives upon the tragedy, Hashem Himself was quiet. No explanation or justification for the harsh and fearsome punishment is provided.

While Hashem didn't directly address the tragedy, He did deliver an important set of Jewish laws. Almost immediately after the tragedy, the laws of kosher food were presented. The Torah provides a lengthy and comprehensive list of forbidden and permissible animals.

The Torah drills down to the details, describing animal hoofs and digestive tracts, to discriminate between kosher and non-kosher animals.

Evidently, the laws of kosher food present a coping mechanism for tragedy. Something about Jewish dietary laws provides a response to the dark clouds of tragedy which engulfed a nation in mourning.

### **Turning to Spirituality**

Often, in the aftermath of tragedy, people turn inward, toward spirituality, and away from materialism. Spirituality provides us with hope and optimism during bleak times, reminding us of a larger narrative beyond our narrow and frustrating predicament. In addition, tragedy exposes us to vulnerability and the fragility of the human condition. Facing our mortality, we veer away from transient experiences toward the eternal and to the infinite. Enduring values and long-term vision speak to us more powerfully in the wake of an incomprehensible calamity.

The experience of keeping kosher inspires greater balance between materialism and spirituality. In theory, kosher laws limit food choices, though in the modern era of widespread availability of kosher food, we rarely experience constraints. Beyond the particular limitations though, kosher laws frames our general attitude toward eating. By regulating our eating, we are better able to preserve a healthy balance between physical experiences and spiritual pursuits.

Having suffered this devastating tragedy, the grieving nation would be eager for a behavioral framework which de-emphasized material gratification and encouraged spirituality. At this point, a wounded nation was amenable to a system of food restrictions.

### **Post-Oct 7th Spirituality**

Our current national tragedy has caused us to turn inward and toward the world of spirituality. On October 6th our country was profoundly entrepreneurial. We had enjoyed startling financial success and, as the start-up nation, we were the technology darlings of the world. Financial success is certainly an important strategic asset, and it enabled us to both build a strong defense force, as well as to open many diplomatic doors. Our material success, however, came at the expense of our spirit and spirituality.

Perhaps, the war will help us strike a healthier balance between our material success and our spirituality. We are fighting an enemy which could care less about the material welfare of its citizens. They continually inflict pain and anguish upon innocent citizens to win public support.

However, they are deeply spiritual and deeply committed to their larger goals, as hideous as those goals may be.

It is impossible to defeat an idea without a more powerful idea. Weapons, tanks, and drones cannot defeat spirit. Only spirit defeats spirit. If we don't tap into our own spirituality, we will not achieve the decisive victory we so desperately battle for.

### **A Kosher "Community"**

There is a second reason that the Torah introduces the concept of kosher food in the wake of an overwhelming tragedy. When confronting tragedy people turn inward to spirituality, but they also turn outward to community. At a purely practical level, community provides logistical and emotional support during a crisis. Furthermore, by sharing feelings with those who share our hardships we feel validated and less isolated in our loneliness. In addition to the practical help which communities offer, they also provide us with an overall feeling of belonging. Belonging to a larger community comforts us during difficult moments. We take solace in being part of a larger group of people with common experiences and with shared destiny.

Kosher dietary laws create a powerful framework for Jewish communal identity. Providing kosher food often requires larger communal resources. Additionally, eating is a highly social experience and the people we dine with become our innate social community. Kosher food is an internal mechanism to assure strong communal bonds amongst Jews. By introducing the laws of kosher food in the aftermath of the horrific tragedy, the Torah encourages us to construct robust communities and to draw strength and comfort from our communal identity during a crisis. Not just from our contemporary community but also from our intergenerational community of the past. It is powerful and affirming to know that, despite our different historical eras, our different cultures, and our different cuisines, we have all prepared meats similarly and we have all avoided mixing meat and milk. Kosher food accentuates communal belonging, and provides us with a response to unexplainable tragedies. Post Oct 7th Communal Identity Over the past few months, we have faced death, sadness, and frustration. Many of our greatest hopes and dreams have been dashed and it is sometimes difficult for us to see a clear path forward. As people of faith, we look darkness eye and envision a brighter future authored by Hashem. Alongside faith, in confronting this crisis, we must also deepen our communal bonds. During the war we peeled away so many layers of identity which divided Jews in Israel, and divided Israelis from Jews abroad. The war

was reductive, stripping away externals of Jewish identity and exposing the common core of what unites every Jew. It endowed us with unity, but it also heightened our communal identity. As the month of Jewish history is about

to dawn let us turn inwards to the world of spirit. Let us also turn outwards to our large nation, those alongside whom we battle for Jewish history, those before us who paved this road, and those after us who, one day, will tell our story.

## Rav Soloveitchik on Shemini: Recognizing Greatness in Our Midst

Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider (Excerpted from *Torah United, Teachings on The Weekly Parashah From Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and The Chassidic Masters* (Ktav, 2023))

**P**arashat Shemini begins by discussing the events which occurred on the eighth and final day of the inauguration of the Mishkan. After months of preparation and anticipation, Aharon and his sons were finally installed as Kohanim in an elaborate service. As part of this, two sin-offerings were brought, a bull calf for Aharon and a he-goat for the Jewish people (Leviticus 9:2-3). Why were sin-offerings necessary at this point?

Targum Yerushalmi, one of the earliest Aramaic renderings of the Torah, glossed that the bull calf was intended to atone for the golden calf worshipped at Sinai, and the he-goat for the goat whose blood Yosef's brothers used to deceive their father about his death. Evidently, before commencing the regular service of the Mishkan, these disturbing and staggering transgressions required additional rectification and forgiveness.<sup>1</sup>

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik discerned a common thread joining the two sins. In a sense, both revolved around how to relate to a once-in-a-generation leader in our midst. The one sin was the product of too little respect, the other of too much. As with most things, the golden mean should be our guide.

When the brothers sold Yosef and tricked their father, beyond the horrifying enmity directed at their brother, they also displayed a callous lack of regard for their own father. The blame for this can be partially lain at Reuven's feet, since he was the first to disrespect Yaakov in the Billah incident, and the younger brothers took their cue from their big brother.<sup>2</sup>

If the towering figure of Yaakov received obscene treatment, it was quite the opposite with Moshe. The people felt absolutely reliant on him, given his extraordinary leadership, his performance of miracles, and his direct connection to God. When he failed to descend the mountain (Exodus 32:1), they made the golden calf. But this excessive dependency on a human being was misplaced:

*It is forbidden to depend entirely upon a human being; our absolute reliance must only be on God. The Jewish people had faith in Moshe, but not in God; they mistakenly thought that*

*Moshe was the redeemer. Had they displayed complete faith in God, the sin would not have taken place.*<sup>3</sup>

We find a similar notion in the Meshech Chochmah by Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk. The breaking of the tablets was not a release of anger, he explained, but an act of pedagogy. Moshe realized that the people mistakenly thought he possessed some inherent holiness that enabled him to perform the miracles and redemption on his own. He broke the tablets to disabuse them of this notion once and for all. Even the divinely written tablets had no inherent holiness and might as well be destroyed if their words would not be heeded. The sanctity of all things derives from their relationship with God.<sup>4</sup>

The Rav further posited a deeper layer of meaning to the bringing of the bull calf for Aharon and the he-goat for the entire people. We often forget, living in an urban world, that animals have particular behavioral characteristics. Nothing escaped the Rav's attention. The brothers' behavior towards Yosef and Yaakov reflected a rebellious instinct, a refusal to accept Yaakov's choice of Yosef to be leader of the family. In this they behaved like brazen goats. The calf brought for Aharon is an animal that follows its mother around submissively, a symbol of the Israelites' unhealthy submissiveness to Moshe.<sup>5</sup>

These two sins required two separate sacrifices for atonement because rectification must address the root cause. The sale of Yosef and the making of the golden calf had contrary motivations: the first was a rejection of paternal and religious authority, as possessed by Yaakov; the second was a product of unhealthy devotion to a charismatic figure, Moshe. Therefore, they could not both be atoned for in a single sacrifice. The Rav teaches us that *teshuvah* (repentance) requires more than the recognition of sin. To truly repent, we too must follow our sins to their roots.<sup>6</sup>

### Exploring the Rav's Insight

The Torah itself indicates that one must revere the leading rabbis of the generation. The Rav quoted Rabbi Akiva's interpretation of the verse: "You shall be in awe of (et) the

Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 6:13). While ostensibly it marks the direct object, it is also homonymous with a preposition meaning “with,” and so is understood as a marker of exegetical inclusiveness. In other words, here the verse instructs us to also be in awe of those who are close to God: Torah scholars.<sup>7</sup> Tosafot is quick to point out that this applies not only to a person’s principal teacher but to the leading Torah scholars of the generation.<sup>8</sup> This mitzvah goes well beyond showing respect to *gedolei ha-dor*, the leading Torah luminaries of the generation. One must be in awe of them.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps the failure to observe this precept led to the mortal sin of Nadav and Avihu. Rashi wrote that they made a halachic ruling in the presence of their teacher Moshe, which is forbidden.<sup>10</sup> The Midrash says they were so self-assured that they didn’t seek counsel from Moshe, Aharon, or even each other.<sup>11</sup> The Talmud notes that Nadav and Avihu wondered to themselves, “When will these two elders die, so that you and I can lead the generation?”<sup>12</sup> All three explanations point in one direction: irreverence or, even worse, a disdain for the Torah personalities of their time.

Rabbi Yehudah Meir Shapiro did not find it likely that the great sons of Aharon would have acted so irreverently

towards their own father and Moshe. They were not waiting for their elderly father and uncle to just die already; they were merely excited about the prospect of leading the nation. Even according to this explanation, their overeagerness to try their hand steering the ship demonstrates they were not in awe of the two giants in their midst. This ended up leading them to offer the incense that had not been commanded by God.

1. This comment is printed as Targum Yonatan on Leviticus 9:2-3. Note that Targum Yonatan is the conventional but mistaken designation, as there is no Targum Yonatan on the Pentateuch.
2. See further Parashat Vayishlach, “A Model Penitent”.
3. Chumash Mesoras Harav, 3:54–55.
4. Meshech Chochmah on Exodus 32:19, s.v. וע"ז צווח משה ככרוכיא.
5. Stone Chumash, 589.
6. Chumash Mesoras Harav, 3:54.
7. Bava Kama 41b.
8. Tosafot ad loc., s.v. לרבות ת"ח.
9. Schachter, *Divrei ha-Rav*, 309.
10. Eruvin 63a.
11. Yalkut Shimoni, §524.
12. Sanhedrin 52a.
13. Leviticus Rabbah, Shemini, 12:2, says that in some respects they were even greater than Aharon and Moshe.

## Rising Expectations

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

Following the seven days of the miluim, during which Aharon and his sons were consecrated for their roles as kohanim, the day arrived when they began serving in this capacity for the first time. In honor of the occasion, God commanded Aharon to offer a number of sacrifices, including an עגל – calf – as a sin-offering. Rashi comments that this עגל was required to atone for Aharon’s role in חטא העגל – the sin of the golden calf.

The Malbim comments that in truth, Aharon had already been forgiven for this sin previously. He had achieved atonement through his process of teshuva, but nevertheless, he needed to offer a special sacrifice to complete the atonement process. The reason, the Malbim explains, is that in the interim, Aharon was named to a higher position of prominence, the role of kohen gadol. When Aharon repented and achieved atonement, he was, of course, a distinguished figure, but now he rose even higher, having been assigned to the lofty position of kohen gadol in the Mishkan. And when a person reaches a higher stature, the Malbim explains, the expectations and demands rise. The requirements for a kohen gadol’s

repentance are stricter than those of somebody else seeking to achieve atonement for his wrongdoing. Now that Aharon rose to a loftier position, he needed to perform teshuva on a higher standard – because the more prominent a person’s role is, the more is expected of him.

Rav Yisroel Meir Druck, in *Lahavos Eish*, elaborates further on this concept, and applies it to the customs observed on a yahrtzeit. It is customary on a family member’s yahrtzeit to perform additional mitzvos in the deceased’s merit – to serve as shaliach tzibur, recite kaddish, spend time learning Torah, sponsor a shiur, and give extra tzedaka. The conventional understanding of this practice is that each year, on a person’s yahrtzeit, he is judged anew, and reevaluated. Of course, after one departs from this world, he can no longer perform mitzvos to tip the scales in his favor, in an effort to earn a favorable judgment. However, when mitzvos are performed in his memory, he receives merit for the good deeds that he brought into being, for the positive impact that he had. We might say that after a person leaves this world, he can no longer deposit money into his savings account, but he can

continue accruing interest on the funds that he had put into the account during his lifetime. Throughout his life, he raised children, and he made an impact upon the people around him, and perhaps even well beyond. He influenced many people in many ways, and this influence continues long after his passing. By performing mitzvos on behalf of the deceased, then, we increase the “interest,” so-to-speak, as his positive impact becomes even greater, and this assists him as his place in the afterlife is being reassessed.

However, Rav Druck suggests an additional insight into this practice, based on the comments of the Malbim

## Those Remarkable Dietary Laws

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

**T**his week’s parasha, parashat Shemini, contains an extensive excursion into the Jewish dietary laws. In fact, an entire chapter of 47 verses is dedicated to this theme. The parasha delves, in broad detail, into the regulations that apply to mammals, fish, birds and even bugs, that are appropriate or inappropriate for Jews to ingest.

The recent growth in the observance of kashruth—Jewish dietary laws, despite their great antiquity, is rather unexpected. At a time when many Americans have distanced themselves from tradition, the rise in demand for kosher food is particularly surprising. Certainly, much of the increase in kosher food consumption is attributable to the high reproductive rate of the more-observant Jewish community who have many mouths to feed in their frequently large families. But, more remarkably, we today are witnessing a return to kashruth observance among second and third generation American Jews whose parents or grandparents abandoned Jewish dietary observance along with other ritual observances, as they secularized, and integrated into the American mainstream.

Throughout the millennia of Jewish history, kashruth has been a major rallying point of Jewish identification. Oppressive enemies, who wished to challenge the Jewish peoples’ right to their own customs and identity, soon focused on kashruth as a point of major confrontation. It was not uncommon for the oppressor, whether Greek, Roman, Ukrainian or Nazi, to relish the opportunity to prohibit the observance of kashruth altogether, or to even force-feed the Jews non-kosher foodstuff.

Too numerous are the Jewish victims who chose to give up their lives for the principle of the sanctity of G-d’s name rather than transgress the sacred covenant

cited above. Now that another year has passed, the soul is elevated to a higher place in the next world. And at this higher elevation, the expectations are greater. The higher the soul rises, the more merit it requires.

From a Torah perspective, prominent roles are primarily a responsibility, not an honor. The higher we climb, the higher the standards that we must maintain. Receiving a prestigious award or appointment places upon the person a heavier burden of responsibility, and demands that he live at a higher standard than he did previously.

of kashruth. Ironically, the past struggles of the Jewish people to maintain their dietary practices in increasingly hostile environments, became even more painful when contrasted with the wholesale abandonment of kashruth observance among younger Jews in times of freedom and enlightenment and the breakdown of the ghetto walls and traditions.

The Jewish dietary laws define food as either “kosher” (right, proper, fit) or “trefah” (torn, unclean and therefore forbidden). Only the flesh of “pure or clean” mammals that have totally cloven hooves and chew their cud may be eaten. Fish must have fins and easily removable scales. Only fowl that are traditionally known as “kosher” may be consumed. Creeping creatures and most winged animals that creep are forbidden, as are certain parts of the bodies of kosher animals that contain non-permissible fats and/or sinews. Also forbidden are non-kosher wines and cheeses, and the milk, eggs and roe of non-kosher animals, birds and fish.

In order to qualify for kosher consumption, kosher animals and fowl must be slaughtered according to Jewish ritual law, inspected for disease or deformity and drained of blood. All mixtures of milk and meat or their derivatives are forbidden. In fact, two sets of dishes, utensils and silverware are the rule in the kosher household, one for meat, the other for dairy. Neutral foods, such as fruits, vegetables and their derivatives are neither meat nor dairy. Known as “pareve,” they may be served with either dairy or meat. Fish, which is also “pareve,” may be eaten at the same meal as milk or meat, but not together with meat. Special dietary laws that govern the Passover holiday prohibit the use of any product that may contain leaven, or anything made of fermented dough.

To be sure, the Torah, the source for the laws and philosophy of Judaism, offers no definitive reason for the observance of kashruth, or for most commandments for that matter. The definitive statement the Torah makes regarding kashruth in Leviticus 11:44, וְהִתְקַדְּשֶׁתֶם וְהִיִּיתֶם, קְדוֹשִׁים, is that by observing these laws the nation of Israel will sanctify themselves and be holy.

Holiness is often defined by religious commentators as separate and/or different. The laws of kashruth certainly emphasize those two characteristics, and if the Jews have not yet achieved the anticipated levels of holiness, the laws of kashruth have certainly succeeded in making the Jewish people “a breed apart.”

While no official reason for the observance of kashruth exists, many commentators and philosophers have sought to offer a rationale for the observances of the kashruth laws, often to draw those who had abandoned the practices back to observance.

The medieval philosopher, halakhist and physician, Maimonides, suggested that the laws of kashruth were a means of enhancing human health (Guide for the Perplexed, Part III, Chap. 48). For this he was roundly taken to task by the famed Don Isaac Abarbanel: “G-d forbid that I should believe that the reasons for forbidden foods are medicinal! For were it so, the Book of G-d’s law should be in the same class as any of the minor brief medical books... Furthermore, our own eyes see that the people who eat pork and insects and such... are well and alive and healthy at this very day...” (Abarbanel, Commentary to Leviticus, Shemini).

Abarbanel, Akeidat Yitzchak and Nachmanides, suggest that the dietary laws were given not for the good of the body, but for the benefit of the soul. They maintain that animals that are permitted to be eaten by Jews are of a higher spiritual nature, resulting in a higher spiritual health and a more saintly character for humans who consume them.

The Midrash Tadshe and the RaMCHaL see self-discipline as the primary reason for kashruth observance. Kashruth laws allow Jews to be in control of their food, rather than have the food control the Jew. Thus, through the kosher diet, each Jew is led to acknowledge the yoke of his Maker, and to remember G-d and His Providence that act “as a restraining factor on our passions and implants in us the fear of G-d that we should not sin.” (Luzzato).

As indicated at the outset, there are many who maintain that the dietary laws were designed to serve as a barrier to separate the Jews from the nations of the world. Rabbi

David Zvi Hoffman, in his commentary to Leviticus, takes issue with that formulation, positing that the separation of the Jewish people from the other nations has already been performed by G-d, and, as a result, Jews are obligated to observe the Divine precepts. To Rabbi Hoffman, kashruth is not a vehicle for separation, but a consequence of it.

Contemporary commentators have found new meaning in the kashruth laws and rituals. Some point out that until the time of Noah, early man was vegetarian, and that meat was permitted to Noah and subsequent generations only as a concession to man’s base nature, suggesting that vegetarianism is a more spiritually uplifting diet. Certainly, the regulations governing the preparation of kosher meat make life more difficult and expensive for the observant Jew, thus ensuring that meat consumption is likely reduced or held to a minimum. Certainly, the kosher meat consumer will pause to consider whether to eat a casual snack of meat at all in light of the fact that according to kashruth regulations there must be a considerable wait after eating meat before a dairy product may be consumed.

Many commentators emphasize the moral and ethical values of the kosher diet—viewing all food as a Divine gift. Any flesh that was produced in a process that caused undue pain to the animal may not be consumed. Nor may milk and meat be eaten at the same meal, suggesting that if a human can be so callous as to take the life of an animal in order to satiate one’s appetite, the least such a person must do is to be certain not to drink milk, a substance that nurtures animal life, together with the meat, that represents the destruction of animal life.

Whatever the reasons for its observance, kashruth for the contemporary Jew has become a rallying point for Jewish identity. So much so, that even the non-observant Soviet “Prisoners of Zion” refused to consume non-kosher food in their prison cells in order to affirm their identification with the Jewish people past, present and future. Some Soviet Jewish heroes and heroines subsisted on diets of tea and crackers for years, rather than let a non-kosher morsel pass through their lips.

The “ironic” question of the moment then becomes this. We, the Jews of the United States, who were able in the 1970s and 80s to convene 1/4 million Jews on the Washington ellipse in short order to rally on behalf of freedom for Soviet Jews who languished behind the Iron Curtain, we who spared no expense to transport our Ethiopian co-religionists to Israel so that they may flourish in the Jewish state, we who are free to practice our religious rites and rituals—should we not feel the obligation to

identify with our people, past, present and future, by freely adopting the customs and practices that have kept our people together? Dare we say to the famed Refusenik, Joseph Mendelovich, “You are a hero for practicing Judaism under incredible adversity—but your observance to those of us who are free, is meaningless!”? Dare we announce to the ancient Maccabees who refused to eat the sacrifice of the swine—“What you did was suitable for

## God is not an On-Demand Product

Rabbi Johnny Solomon

Once the Mishkan was erected, Moshe instructed Aharon about the offerings which he was obligated to bring as the Kohen Gadol – promising him that when he does so, ‘the glory of the Lord will appear’ (Vayikra 9:6).

After a lengthy description of Aharon’s various activities, we are then told that Aharon completed all the tasks which he had been instructed to do exactly ‘as Moshe had commanded him’ (ibid. 9:21), and that Aharon then blessed the people (ibid. 9:22). But by this stage, the glory of the Lord had not appeared.

The Torah then informs us that Moshe and Aharon enter the Ohel Moed (ibid. 9:23), but significantly, it does not tell us what they did there. Rashi, quoting the Midrash, provides us with an answer by explaining that Moshe and Aharon ‘prayed for mercy’. But why did they need to pray for mercy?

By this point, Aharon had done everything that Moshe had instructed him. Nevertheless, the glory of the Lord had not appeared. As a result, Aharon was worried that he may have done something wrong in the way in which he had carried out Moshe’s instructions. Alternatively, even though the Mishkan seemingly symbolized the atonement of the Jewish people for the sin of the Egel HaZahav (The Golden Calf), Aharon was concerned that perhaps God had not truly forgiven him for the central role that he played in its construction. Frustrated and disappointed, Aharon turns to his brother Moshe looking for wisdom, comfort, and guidance, and Moshe, wishing to support and reassure Aharon, offers to accompany him into the Ohel Moed where, together, they prayed to God for mercy. We are then told that upon leaving the Ohel Moed, Moshe and Aharon blessed the people - at which point ‘the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people’ (ibid.).

Having learnt this story we must now ask: What is going on? And why did Aharon feel frustrated and disappointed?

your time but is thoroughly irrelevant for us today!?”

Kashruth in the 21st century is far more than a religious ritual. It is, in effect, a profound bond that unites Jew to Jew, a most meaningful tether that secures an individual to a nation, it is the sacred energy that connects a people and a nation to its very essence. It is, for sure, a vital ritual for every Jew to embrace.

Though numerous commentaries have attempted to address these and other related questions, I believe that to reach an answer we must first consider how Aharon perceived the Mishkan and his service as the Kohen Gadol.

As noted, Aharon performs the service. The glory of God does not appear. And Aharon then feels that his service has been rejected or has been ineffective. On this basis, it seems that Aharon initially perceived the Mishkan as some kind of ‘sacred vending machine’ where he, as the Kohen Gadol, submitted certain ‘products’ (i.e. sacrifices), from which he expected that other ‘products’ be dispensed by God (i.e. atonement and the presence of the divine glory in the Mishkan).

However, not only is this an erroneous understanding of what the Mishkan is, but it is also an erroneous understanding of all other aspects of our divine service. Aharon expected that his avodah in the Mishkan would stimulate an immediate divine response. But given this attitude, God deliberately delayed the appearance of His glory to teach Aharon an important lesson about spiritual patience, and how God’s presence will appear as-and-when God is ready: Neither divine atonement, nor the divine presence, are on-demand products, and even the perfect service in the Mishkan needs to be accompanied by prayers for mercy.

Clearly, this lesson is truly timeless, and just like Aharon’s initial approach, too many of us are spiritually impatient and we erroneously assume that divine inspiration is an on-demand product.

But beyond applying this lesson to ourselves, it also helps provide us with a meaningful context to understand the actions of Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon, who then offer their own incense which God had not commanded, and who are then punished for doing so (see Vayikra 10:1).

Over the centuries many commentaries have attempted

to explain the specific sin of Nadav and Avihu. But in light of what we have explained above, I believe that they did not learn the lesson of their father. Aharon had been spiritually impatient, and he was then taught a lesson that God's presence will appear as-and-when God is ready.

However, Nadav and Avihu did not like that message. Instead, they believed that there was a work-around for how the Mishkan functioned and that by performing a service which God had not commanded of them, they could 'force' God to respond. God did respond, but as we know, the response came in the form of their death. Accordingly, while the incense-offering of Nadav and Avihu was the action that triggered their death, their ultimate failing was not learning the lesson that their father Aharon had just been taught (in fact, it is possible that part

of Aharon's silent mourning included blaming himself for not having made this lesson clear enough to them).

When we learn the Torah we are meant to apply its lessons to our lives. Yet while this is so, too many of us today are spiritually impatient, and we erroneously assume that divine inspiration is an on-demand product. Moreover, there are those who think that the use of various 'segulot' provide spiritual workarounds which can 'force' God to respond to whatever situation we may be facing - just like Nadav and Avihu thought that their incense could 'force' God to respond.

Given all this, what we learn from Parshat Shmini are the values of patience, humility, grace and mercy, and that rather than God being at our service, our task and calling is to be at God's service.

## I Will Be Sanctified Through Those Near To Me

Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander

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 word דום (*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, בקרובי אקדש, "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 unified in purpose and peace.

## Nadav and Avihu

Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל אֶהֱרֵן הוּא אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' לֵאמֹר בְּקִרְבֵי אֶקְדֹּשׁ וְעַל פְּנֵי כָל הָעָם אֶקְבֹּד וַיִּדַם אֶהֱרֵן.

*Moshe said to Aharon: Of this Hashem spoke, saying: “Through those who are near Me I will be sanctified, and before the entire people I will be honored,” and Aharon was silent. (10:3)*

The opening section of our Parsha discusses the inaugural day of the Mishkan. This joyous and much-awaited occasion was marred by the tragic death of Nadav and Avihu, two of Aharon's sons, which the Torah (10:1) refers to as “offering a foreign fire that He (Hashem) had not commanded them.”

In terms of the sin as described in the pasuk, it does seem to have been that grave, and yet it was met with a punishment that was both harsh and decisive. The Meshech Chochmah explains that the deaths of Nadav and Avihu were very much connected with the background to that inaugural day and, to a certain degree, were even caused by it.

The presence of the Mishkan itself served as testimony that Hashem had forgiven Bnei Yisrael for the Chet Ha'egel.<sup>1</sup> Although initially, the people had faced a decree of annihilation for committing that sin; in response to their Teshuvah and Moshe Rabbeinu's prayers on their behalf, the decree had been averted. Additionally, through their generous and inspired contributions, the Mishkan was built, bringing about the return of the Clouds of Glory and the residing of the Divine Presence in their midst. This was the first time the people had been forgiven for one of their

sins, something that was the cause of much joy and relief. However, it was also something that, if taken the wrong way, could potentially undermine and render meaningless their entire relationship with Hashem and with His Torah.

It was critically important that the people not confuse Hashem's forgiveness as a response to sincere and heartfelt Teshuvah with the idea that He doesn't hold people accountable for their actions in the first place. The entire concept of Torah and mitzvos is based on the principle that every deed – both positive and negative – has consequences. The potential misunderstanding that could occur with regards to Teshuvah is that it doesn't so much work to undo those consequences, but rather reflects the idea that there never really are any. This is an unacceptable notion which could lead to dire consequences of its own. As the Gemara (Bava Kama 50a) puts it, “כל האומר הקב“ה, ותרן, יותרו חייו, *Whoever says that the Holy One, Blessed is He, is disregarding (of sin), his life shall be disregarded.*

Therefore, alongside the forgiveness the people had been granted for the Chet Ha'Egel, it was necessary to demonstrate that all wrongdoings must – and will – be accounted for. Thus, at a certain point on that day, the slightest of infractions was met with the harshest of reactions, “וַתֵּצֵא אֵשׁ מִלִּפְנֵי ה' וַתֹּאכַל אוֹתָם וַיָּמָתוּ לִפְנֵי ה', *A fire came forth from before Hashem and consumed them, and they died before Hashem. (10:2)* The exacting nature of this situation was underscored by the fact that all this occurred on the inaugural day of the Mishkan, a day referred to by Chazal (Taanis 26b) as יום שמחת לבו, *The day of His (Hashem's) joy.* At a time of one's joy it is common for

an atmosphere of magnanimity to prevail and for one to be more foregoing of infractions, especially minor ones. Moreover, the ones who were punished were among those few who had been found worthy of performing the avodah. In the event, none of the above factors mitigated against the severe response which met them for their wrongdoing.

All of this served to engrave indelibly within the people's consciousness the gravity of transgressing one of the Torah's prohibitions. In a sense, therefore, it was this very episode which allowed for their forgiveness over the Chet Ha'Egel. Once it was clear that Hashem's forgiveness would not be misconstrued or abused, it could be granted in full.

This is the meaning of Moshe's words to Aharon: Of this Hashem spoke, saying: "Through those who are near Me I will be sanctified, and before the entire people I will be honored." The syntactical relationship between these two phrases is that the fulfillment of the first idea is what enables the meaningful existence of the second. Once Hashem was "sanctified through those near to Him," by punishing Nadav and Avihu for their relatively minor sin, this "allowed" for Him to be "honored before the people" by restoring the Shechinah in their midst. Without the example set by Aharon's sons, the Shechinah may never have fully returned.

In light of this idea, we can now appreciate on a deeper level Aharon's response to Moshe's words as recorded by the pasuk, וַיִּדַם אֶהְרֶן, *Aharon was silent*. The acceptance reflected within this silence is cognizance of the fact that the death of Nadav and Avihu played a crucial role in the restoration of the Shechinah to Yisrael.

Moreover, this will also explain Moshe's ensuing instruction to Elazar and Itamar, Aharon's two surviving sons:

וַאֲחֵיכֶם כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל יִבְכוּ אֵת הַשְּׂרִפָּה אֲשֶׁר שָׂרַף ה'.

*And your brethren the entire House of Yisrael shall mourn the conflagration that Hashem ignited. (10:6)*

This is a most unusual command! In all other cases where the Torah records that someone was mourned upon their passing, it is on the initiative of the people. Nowhere do we find that the people are commanded to mourn! Indeed, if they do not themselves feel that they should mourn, what is the meaning of commanding them to do so?

However, on this occasion, Moshe is informing the people that they should mourn the death of Aharon's sons, even if they did not know them personally. The reason for this is that the people were in part responsible for that event. It was only as a result of the Chet ha'Egel committed

by the people that it was necessary for Aharon's sons to be met with such harsh punishment. As such, Moshe informs the people, their passing is indeed cause for national mourning.<sup>2</sup>

1. See Rashi to Shemos 38:21 s.v. mishkan.
2. Indeed, this explanation of the Meshech Chochmah may give us added insight into the fact that the Torah reading for Yom Kippur begins with a reference to the death of Nadav and Avihu (Vayikra 16:1). Moreover, the Zohar exhorts us to mourn their loss at that juncture in the Torah reading. Perhaps we may suggest that the Torah introduces the Parsha of the Yom Kippur avodah in this way in order to caution Bnei Yisrael in future generations as well not to misconstrue or mishandle the idea of Teshuvah which is so central to the day. The atonement which is available – and assured – on Yom Kippur, is solely as the result of sincere Teshuvah. In order to underscore the idea that forgiveness will not simply occur through Hashem's disregard of our actions, we begin the Torah reading by reminding ourselves of the lesson we learned from Nadav and Avihu concerning this crucial point. By mourning the fact that their deaths were needed in order to reach us this lesson, it will hopefully serve to ensure that we do not ignore or neglect it ourselves.