

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### Wein Online

**T**he laws of kashrut regarding animals, fish and fowl are outlined for us in the parsha of the week. The Torah makes strong emphasis on the word "I'havdil" - to distinguish, to separate - in its discussion of these laws.

In fact, in its summary at the end of the parsha, the Torah explains to us that the main purpose of the kashrut laws is to enable us to identify and thus distinguish between the pure and the impure, between what is proper for human consumption and what is not.

In a deeper sense, we can see that the very essence of Jewish belief and lifestyle is the ability to distinguish and separate the holy from the mundane, right from wrong, constant and continuing values from passing fads, the eternal from the fleeting temporary.

Judaism is not a "you're okay, I'm okay" religion of relativism and constantly changing standards of behavior and belief. It not only stands for something - it defines clearly, in minute detail, what it is that it stands for. Its commandments are meant to shape a person's drive towards holiness and immortality.

It rejects the impure and demands righteousness of behavior and the avoidance of impurity in our thoughts, food, behavior and speech. All of this is in line with the charge and challenge issued to us at Sinai that we are to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

The Torah has never compromised on that demand. The laws of kashrut described in this week's parsha are part of that G-dly demand for our behavior to be characterized as being holy in nature.

The late great Rabbi Meir Shapiro of pre-World War II Lublin visited the United States in the 1920's on a fund-raising mission regarding the construction of his yeshiva in Lublin.

He was feted and honored throughout the American Jewish community during his visit. Even his fund raising efforts met with more than moderate success.

Nevertheless, upon returning to Poland he

**Please keep  
Bracha Shaindel Rochel bas Chaya Sara  
in mind for a Refuah Shelaima**

communicated this pithy comment on American Jewry to his peers: "American Jewry has learned to make Kiddush; it has not yet learned how to make havdalah!" Havdalah - the ability to identify what is harmful to Jewish life and holiness and to separate one's self from it - is infinitely harder to deal with than is the convivial Kiddush.

Without havdalah all succeeding generations are doomed to assimilation and loss of Jewish identity and values. Without having degrees of real separation built into Jewish life we are destined for spiritual extinction.

All of Jewish history has borne proof to this simple assertion. Ignoring the Torah commandments and aping the negative attributes of the cultures of the non-Jewish world lead to spiritual downfall and dire consequences for both the individual and the nation as a whole.

In a general world society that exhibits very little evidence of a moral compass, the task of being a holy and pure individual and people is greatly compounded.

Only by acquiring the discerning skill of separation and distinguishing correctly in all of life's choices that we face can we hope to achieve that lofty goal of being truly a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. © 2008 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory](http://www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory).

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

**“A**nd Moshe spoke to Aharon, and to Elazar and to Isamar his remaining sons" (Vayikra 10:12). What were they "remaining" from? Rashi tells us that they were spared from death, as they too should have been killed, like their brothers Nadav and Avihu, because of Aharon's sin by the golden calf. However, Moshe prayed on their behalf, a prayer that was only partially successful. Although it didn't save Nadav and Avihu, it did negate the part of the original punishment that would have affected Elazar and Isamar, who were spared from death and "remained."

If Moshe's prayer didn't work for Nadav and Avihu, the implication is that they died because of Aharon's sin, not because of the "foreign fire" they had

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brought. (Otherwise, it could be said that Moshe's prayer worked completely, but their deaths came because of a totally separate, unrelated cause.) This can be easily explained though, as Nadav and Avihu dying affected Aharon too, and if he didn't deserve to have his sons die, even if they sinned they might have been spared for his sake. However, now that Aharon deserved to have his sons die because of the golden calf, and they deserved to die because of their own sin, they were punished for bringing the "foreign fire" in the Mishkan.

What about Elazar and Isamar though? If they were only saved because of Moshe's prayer, they must have really deserved to die too. But what did they do? Not only that, but the Talmud (Yoma 87a) tells us that what saved Elazar and Isamar was the merit of their father Aharon! Which one was it; would Aharon, because of his sin by the golden calf, have been a reason for his sons to be punished, or was his righteousness the reason they were spared? And if Aharon was able to protect his sons, how could it be said that they were only spared because of Moshe's prayer on their behalf? Or, alternatively, if they were spared because of Moshe's prayer, how could it be said that the reason they were spared was because of their father's merits?

When Nadav and Avihu died, Moshe told Aharon that he knew those close to G-d would perish in the Mishkan, but thought it would be one of them (see Rashi on 10:3). Why would someone close to G-d perish? Because the level of holiness was so great that any misstep would result in the offender being punished, and only after someone on a high level gets punished for not doing things exactly right will everybody else realize how careful they must be. The awesomeness of the Mishkan could not be grasped until such an event occurred, which was what happened when Nadav and Avihu were killed by the heavenly fire for their mistake. Extreme care must be taken whenever approaching the Mishkan/Temple and doing the service, which is why one of the major jobs of the Leviyim was to be the "gatekeepers," making sure no one inappropriate entered the Temple compound and warning everyone about its sanctity, and why the Kohanim were warned not to allow the Leviyim to overstep their bounds, lest they perish (see Bamidbar

4:18). Obviously, the Kohanim had to be very careful as well, as any misstep on their part could have severe consequences. This applied to Elazar and Isamar, the only other Kohanim besides Aharon, Nadav and Avihu. Unfortunately, they were not perfect either, and should have also died on the day of the Mishkan's inauguration (see Y"S 530). They may not have done anything as bad as Nadav and Avihu did, but they deserved to be punished nonetheless.

So now we have all four of Aharon's sons deserving to die, and Aharon deserving to have all of his sons die. However, since Moshe had stepped in and was able to partially remove Aharon's punishment, even though he deserves to have all four of his sons punished, only two of them will actually be punished. Which two? The ones that did the more offensive act, the ones who brought the "foreign fire." Now that Moshe's prayer was able to remove the part of Aharon's punishment from the sin of the golden calf that would have affected Elazar and Isamar, even if they deserved to die because of their own actions, unless Aharon also deserved, for actions besides the golden calf, the suffering he would experience if they died, they would be spared. And, in fact, because of Aharon's righteousness, he was able to protect his remaining sons, and Elazar and Isamar were spared.

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**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

In some circles, it is assumed that the laws of kashruth, the dietary laws, are related to health. By abstaining for example, from the consumption of swine, one is protected from trichinosis. A cursory glimpse of our portion indicates otherwise. The Torah states that the reason for kashruth is kedusha. In the words of the Torah, "You shall be kedoshim for I am kadosh." (Leviticus 11:45)

In fact, every time the Torah discusses the dietary laws, it gives as its underlying reason-kedusha. (See, for example, Deuteronomy 14:21) An analysis of this term can give us a deeper understanding of the dietary laws.

On one level, kedusha means "separation." Thus, when someone contributes something to the Holy Temple, the Beit Hamikdash, it is called "hekdesh" for it can be used for no other purpose other than the Temple. From this perspective, kashruth forces the Jews to identify him or herself as the Torah insists that the everyday activity of eating has the stamp of Jewishness.

Another approach to kedusha comes to mind through considering what many deem as the three major Jewish rituals - the Sabbath, the laws of family purity and the dietary laws. It is not a coincidence that these rituals correspond to the three major physical

drives of the human being—the desire to be powerful, the desire to engage in sexual relations and the desire to eat.

In each case, the Torah does not insist that we abstain from these fundamental human drives. Rather, it channels the fulfillment of these desires in a way that gives them more meaning and purpose. The Torah understands the human quest to be powerful, but asks that on the Sabbath we abstain from all work, allowing for time to evaluate the purpose of this quest and to recognize that our creative powers come from G-d. In a similar fashion, the Torah sees the sexual encounter in a positive light. Indeed, sexual pleasure, onah, is a cornerstone of the marital encounter. Here again, however, the Torah asks that we commit ourselves to the laws of family purity as a way of ensuring that the physical act does not become the sole expression of a couple's love. Finally, the Torah wants people to enjoy food. Through such laws as humane slaughter of animals, the laws of kashruth lift the eating process to a higher plain.

No wonder the word kadosh surrounds each of these rituals. Shabbat is referred to as Shabbat kodesh. The very word that begins the marital relationship is kiddushin. And the way we eat is likened to the service of the Holy Temple (Beit Hamikdash).

Thus, the word kadosh is a term that embraces human physicality, but asks that the physical act be elevated and, in fact, sanctified. Observance of Jewish ritual is not solely an act that connects us to G-d. It is a means through which human life can be ennobled; it is nothing less than a pathway to an ethical and kadosh existence. © 2008 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

#### **RABBI NAFTALI REICH**

### **Legacy**

**W**hat can be more painful than the loss of a child? After a parent holds his infant child in his arms, after he helps the growing child walk, speak, read, discover the wonders of the world, the child becomes forever a living part of the parent. The death of a child, therefore, rips a gaping hole in the parent's heart, a wound that can never be healed—and the older the child the more gaping the wound.

In times of such terrible tragedy, it is almost impossible for a parent not to cry out in grief and anguish, not to scream with pain. And yet, in this week's Torah portion we are told that when Aaron witnessed the violent death of his two grown sons "Vayidom Aharon—Aaron was silent." How deeply he must have been hurt and grieved by the loss of his beloved sons! But nonetheless he remained totally silent. He showed no reaction whatsoever. How can this be? How could he suppress his cries of anguish?

Furthermore, the Midrash tells us that the Creator rewarded Aaron for remaining silent by conveying through him, rather than through Moses, the prohibition against performing the Temple service in a state of alcoholic intoxication. The question immediately arises: The Torah is attuned to the feelings of the mourner and actually encourages him to cry for the first three days of his bereavement; why then was Aaron's suppression of his cries of anguish so praiseworthy? And if his silence was indeed so commendable, how was his selection to convey the prohibition against intoxication during the Temple service a fitting reward?

The Hebrew word the Torah uses here to portray Aaron's silence, domeim, has two other meanings—the state of being inert and singing. What common thread connects silence, inertia and song? Let us consider for a moment the most desirable state that all people seek. The American Declaration of Independence actually hits the nail on the head when it speaks of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Everyone wants to be happy, but how is this achieved? Does a lot of money deliver happiness? More often than not, it accomplishes the exact opposite. Does physical gratification deliver happiness? Hardly.

Happiness depends on inner harmony. When a person is at peace with himself and his environment, he is happy. But harmony does not derive from external sources. It emanates from within, from serenity of the soul. Our senses, however, are the enemies of harmony. They constantly bombard us with a variety of stimuli to which we are inclined to react, and thus our harmony is disrupted. We cannot be at peace with ourselves if we are at the mercy of a volatile world.

A simple experiment proves this point. Enter a room by yourself, shut out all sound, close the lights and sit back with your eyes closed. In a short while you will undoubtedly feel a pleasant serenity (if you don't fall asleep). Insulated from external influences, your soul naturally gravitates towards harmony; it enters a state of happiness. Thus, inertia and silence lead to song. The only problem is that we cannot spend our lives in a dark and silent room, and as soon as we step out, we are back into the maelstrom.

Aaron, however, was able to achieve absolute harmony and serenity even in the midst of the active world. His faith in the Creator was so profound that he was impervious to external stimuli. He did not react to his senses; his thoughts and actions all emanated from the wellsprings of his soul within. Even when his two sons perished suddenly, he did not react with an outcry of pain. He dealt with his sorrow within the confines of his soul. He bowed to the will of the Creator with perfect acceptance, and his harmony remained undisturbed. "And Aaron was silent."

As a reward for this transcendent silence, the Creator conveyed the prohibition against intoxication during the Temple service through him. The priestly

service symbolized the spiritual bond between the human soul and its Creator, and as such, it could only be distorted by external stimulants such as alcohol and other consciousness-altering chemical substances. Aaron had shown himself to be completely at peace with his inner self, and therefore, he was the perfect conduit for this prohibition.

In our own lives, we can also seek to achieve, to the best of our abilities, some semblance of inner harmony. The key is to recognize the source of true happiness, that it does not come from external sources but from within. When we embrace Torah values and ideals, we insulate our inner selves against the vicissitudes of the world around us, and we are rewarded with a harmonious and immeasurable enriched life. © 2008 Rabbi A. Wagensberg & aish.com

### **RABBI JONATHAN SACKS**

## **Covenant & Conversation**

**T**he great moment has come. For seven days—beginning on the 23rd Adar—Moses had consecrated Aaron and the priests. Now, on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, the time has arrived for Aaron to begin his service, ministering to the people on behalf of G-d: "It came to pass on the eighth day, that Moses called to Aaron and his sons, and the elders of Israel, and he said to Aaron, take a young bull for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering, without blemish, and offer them before the Lord."

What is the significance of the "eighth day," the phrase that gives our sedra its name? To understand the profound symbolism of the number eight, we have to go back to creation itself.

In the beginning, when all was "waste and void," G-d created the universe. Day by day, the world unfolded. First, there were the domains: light and dark, the upper and lower waters, sea and dry land. Then there were the objects that filled the domains: the sun, moon and stars, then the fish and birds, and finally the land animals, culminating in mankind. Then came Shabbat, the seventh day, the day of limits and of holiness, on which first G-d, then His covenantal people, rested in order to show that there are boundaries to creation ("Why is G-d's name Shaddai? Because he said to the universe, Enough-she'amar le'olam dai). There is an integrity to nature. Everything has its proper place, its ecological niche, its function and dignity in the totality of being. Holiness consists in respecting boundaries and honouring the natural order.

Thus, the seven days. But what of the eighth day—the day after creation? For this, we have to turn to Torah she-be'al peh, the oral tradition.

On the sixth day, G-d made His most fateful decision: to create a being who, like Himself, had the capacity to create. Admittedly, there is a fundamental distinction between human creativity ("something from something") and Divine creativity ("something from

nothing"). That is why human beings are "the image of G-d" but not-as Nietzsche argued-G-ds themselves.

Yet the ability to create goes hand in hand with the ability to destroy. There cannot be one without the other. Every new technology can be used to heal or harm. Every power can be turned to good or evil. That is why, unlike all other elements of creation, the Torah prefaces the making of man with a reflective statement—"Let us make..."—as if to signal the risk implicit in creating a being with the power of speech, imagination and freewill: the one life form capable of disobeying G-d and threatening the order and orderliness of nature.

The danger immediately becomes clear. G-d tells the first man not to eat of the fruit of one tree. The nature of the tree is irrelevant; what matters is its symbolic function. It represents the fact that creation has boundaries—the most important being the boundary between the permitted and forbidden. That is why there had to be, even in paradise, something that was forbidden. When the first two human beings ate of the forbidden fruit, the essential harmony between man and nature was broken. Humanity lost its innocence. For the first time, nature (the world we find) and culture (the world we make) came into conflict. The result was paradise lost.

The sages were intrigued by the chronology of the narrative. According to them, the entire drama of the creation and disobedience of Adam and Eve took place on the sixth day. On that day, they were made, they were commanded about the tree, they transgressed the command and were sentenced to exile. Not only were they condemned to leave the garden. Also, as the day reached its close and night began to fall, they experienced darkness for the first time.

In compassion, G-d allowed them a stay of sentence. They were given an extra day in Eden—namely Shabbat. For the whole of that day, the sun did not set. As it too came to a close, G-d showed the first human beings how to make light: With the going out of the Sabbath, the celestial light began to fade. Adam was afraid that the serpent would attack him in the dark. Therefore G-d illuminated his understanding, and he learned to rub two stones against each other and produce light for his needs. This, according to the sages, is the reason we light a havdalah candle at the end of Shabbat to inaugurate the new week.

There is, in other words, a fundamental difference between the light of the first day ("And G-d said, Let there be light...") and that of the eighth day. The light of the first day is the illumination G-d makes. The light of the eighth day is the illumination G-d teaches us to make. It symbolizes our "partnership with G-d in the work of creation." There is no more beautiful image than this of how G-d empowers us to join Him in bringing light to the world. On Shabbat we remember G-d's creation. On the eighth day (motsei Shabbat) we

celebrate our creativity as the image and partner of G-d.

To understand the full depth of what the sages were saying, it is necessary to go back to one of the great myths of the ancient world: the story of Prometheus. To the Greeks, the G-ds were essentially hostile to mankind. Zeus wanted to keep the art of making fire secret, but Prometheus stole a spark and taught men how to make it. Once the theft was discovered, Zeus punished him by having him chained to a rock, with an eagle pecking at his liver.

Against this background can we see the revolutionary character of Jewish faith. We believe that G-d wants human beings to exercise power: responsibly, creatively, and within limits set by the integrity of nature. The rabbinic account of how G-d taught Adam and Eve the secret of making fire is the precise opposite of the story of Prometheus. G-d seeks to confer dignity on the beings He made in His image as an act of love. He does not hide the secrets of the universe from us. He does not seek to keep mankind in a state of ignorance or dependence. The creative G-d empowers us to be creative and begins by teaching us how. He wants us to be guardians of the world He has entrusted to our care. That is the significance of the eighth day. It is the human counterpart of the first day of creation.

We now understand the symbolic significance of the eighth day in relation to the Tabernacle. As we have noted elsewhere, the linguistic parallels in the Torah show that the construction of the mishkan in the wilderness mirrors the Divine creation of the world. The Tabernacle was intended to be a miniature universe, constructed by human beings. Just as G-d made the earth as a home for mankind, so the Israelites in the wilderness built the Tabernacle as a symbolic home for G-d. It was their act of creation.

Thus it had to begin on the eighth day, just as Adam and Eve began their creative endeavour on the eighth day. Just as G-d showed them how to make light so, many centuries later, He taught the Israelites how to make a space for the Divine presence so that they too would be accompanied by light-G-d's light, in the form of the fire that consumed the sacrifices, and the light of the menorah. If the first day represents Divine creation, the eighth day signifies human creation under the tutelage and sovereignty of G-d. We can now also understand the significance of the other major theme of Shmini, namely the list of permitted and forbidden foods.

Many explanations have been given of the dietary laws. Some see them as rules of hygiene. Potentially disease-ridden animals are to be avoided. Others see them as a discipline of self restraint. In the words of Rav: "the commandments were given to refine human beings." Yet others see in them a set of laws that have no logic other than the fact that they were

given by G-d. On this view, the holy-our glimpse of the Infinite-inevitably transcends our understanding.

However, the simplest and most profound explanation is the one given, in Shmini, by the Torah itself: "I am the LORD your G-d; hallow yourselves and be holy, because I am holy... I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your G-d; therefore be holy, because I am holy... You must distinguish [le-havdil] between the unclean and the clean, between living creatures that may be eaten and those that may not be eaten."

A similar statement appears later, in Vayikra 20: 24-26: "... I am the LORD your G-d, who has set you apart [hivdalti] from the nations. You must therefore make a distinction [ve-hivdaltem] between clean and unclean animals and between unclean and clean birds. Do not defile yourselves by any animal or bird or anything that moves along the ground-those which I have set apart [hivdalti] as unclean for you. You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart [va-avdil] from the nations to be my own."

The key words are "holy" (which appears seven times in these two passages) and le-havdil, "to distinguish" (which appears five times). To be holy is to make distinctions, to recognize and honour the Divine order of creation. Originally, according to the Torah, human beings (and animals) were to be vegetarians ("I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it; they will be yours for food"). After the Flood, humanity was permitted to eat meat, with the exception of blood (which represents the sanctity of life itself). A concession was made to the human tendency to violence. It is as if G-d had said: If you must kill, then kill animals, not human beings.

However, the people of Israel were to serve as role models of a higher ideal. They were permitted to kill animals for food, but only those that best exemplified Divine order. So, amphibians were forbidden because they lack a definite place. Others were forbidden because they lack clear form- sea creatures that lack a shape defined by fins and scales; land animals that are not ruminants with clearly defined cloven hoofs. Creatures that prey on others are also forbidden. The overall logic of the dietary laws- the laws of a people called on to be holy-is to permit only those animals that are paradigm cases, clear examples, of order. I cannot do better than quote the insightful words of Leon Kass (in his fine book, *The Hungry Soul*): "The Levitical dietary laws fit the human animal in his distinctive uprightness: Celebrating the principle of rational separation, they celebrate not only man's share in rationality but also his openness to the mystery of intelligible yet embodied form... The low is made high- or at least higher- through acknowledgement of its dependence on the high; the high is "brought down,"

democratized and given concrete expression in the forms that govern ordinary daily life. The humdrum of existence and the passage of time are sanctified when the hallowed separateness of the Seventh Day is brought into human life when it is commemorated as the Sabbath. Likewise the commonness of eating is sanctified through observance of Divine commandments, whose main principles remind the mindful eaters of the supreme rule of the Holy One."

Human beings become holy when they become distinction-making animals, when they recognize and act so as to honour the boundaries of nature. We now see an extraordinary and intimate connection between five themes: (1) the creation of the universe (2) the building of the sanctuary (3) the dietary laws (4) the Havdalah ceremony at the end of Shabbat (5) the number eight.

The story of creation tells us that nature is not a blind struggle between contending forces, in which the strongest wins and power is the most important gift. To the contrary: the universe is fundamentally good. It is a place of ordered harmony, the intelligible design of a single creator. That harmony is constantly threatened by mankind. In the covenant with Noah, G-d establishes a minimum threshold for human civilisation. In the covenant with Israel, he establishes a higher code of holiness. The principle of holiness, as of creation itself, is the maintenance of boundaries, within which every form of life receives its due.

The sanctuary, with its partitions, represents boundary-making in space. The dietary laws, with their divisions of permitted and forbidden, represents boundary-making in life, in the act of eating, the most natural of human activities. The priest-the person who most exemplifies holiness- is defined by his ability to make distinctions (the role of the cohen is "to distinguish [le-havdil] between the holy and the profane, between the unclean and the clean"-note again the key words holy and le-havdil, "to distinguish").

In the ceremony of havdalah at the start of the eighth day, we become G-d's partners in the work of creation. Like Him, we begin by creating light and proceed to make distinctions ("Blessed are you... who makes a distinction between sacred and profane, light and darkness..."). The eighth day thus becomes the great moment at which G-d entrusts His creative work to the people He has taken as His covenantal partners. So it was with the Tabernacle, and so it is with us.

This vision epitomises the priestly voice within Judaism. It is a vision of great beauty. It sees the world as a place of order in which everything has its place and dignity within the richly differentiated tapestry of creation. To be holy is to be a guardian of that order, a task delegated to us by G-d. That is both an intellectual and ethical challenge: intellectually to be able to recognise the boundaries and limits of nature, ethically to have the humility to preserve and conserve the world

for the sake of generations yet to come. © 2008 Rabbi J. Sacks and aish.com

**RABBI ABBA WAGENSBERG**

## Between the Lines

**T**his week's Torah portion contains the dramatic story of Nadav and Avihu, two of Aaron's sons, who bring a strange offering to G-d. This is so unacceptable that a fire consumes them on the spot and they die. The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni 524) suggests seven reasons why Aaron's sons might have deserved death:

(1) Nadav and Avihu were impatient for Moses and Aaron to die so that they could take over leadership of the Jewish people. (2) They made Jewish legal decisions in front of Moses, their rabbi, a sign of disrespect. (3) They entered the holy area while intoxicated. (4) They entered the holy area without first washing their hands and feet. (5) They entered the holy area without wearing the priestly garments (6) They did not get married. (7) They did not try to have children.

Although these reasons seem entirely unrelated, we could suggest that all seven of them stem from one fundamental fault. Nadav and Avihu were great people, and they were aware of their high spiritual level. Yet they felt they had already reached the pinnacle of their achievement, and therefore had no need to strive for further growth and self-improvement. This misjudgment was the root of all seven possible reasons for their death:

1. Nadav and Avihu felt they had reached completion and perfection, so it seemed fitting for them to take over leadership of the Jewish people.

2. They felt they had achieved the epitome of Torah knowledge, so they made Jewish legal decisions in front of their rabbi.

3. Since they assumed they had reached their maximum potential, they felt they could relax, so they entered the holy area while intoxicated.

4. Since they felt they had reached the height of purity, they no longer needed water to become purified, so they entered the holy area without first washing their hands and feet.

5. Since they felt they had achieved perfection, they no longer needed the atonement provided by the priestly garments (Arachin 16a), so they entered the holy area without wearing them.

6. They assumed that, since they had perfected themselves, G-d could speak with them at any time-as He did with Moses, who separated from his wife, Tziporah, due to this consideration (Numbers 12:7-8) - so they did not get married.

7. Since they did not get married, they were halachically forbidden from having children outside of marriage.

Now that we see the common source of the seven reasons, let us examine another detail of the

story. The Torah tells us (Leviticus 10:2) that a fire consumed Nadav and Avihu after they brought their strange offering. According to the Yalkut Shimoni (524), this fire came from the Holy of Holies. Why is it relevant to know the source of the fire?

The Holy of Holies contained only one vessel: the Holy Ark. Unlike the other Temple vessels, the dimensions of the Ark were all fractions -- 2.5 by 1.5 by 1.5 cubits (Exodus 25:10). According to the commentator Kli Yakar, the fractional measurements of the Ark teach us that we should always feel lacking in regards to the wisdom we have acquired. Each of the Ark's dimensions teaches us a different dimension of this lesson. The height of the Ark shows us that we lack depth of knowledge; the length shows us that we lack breadth of knowledge; and the width shows us that we lack the ability to grasp concepts.

In Hebrew, the same word *midot* means both "measurements" and "character traits." This is why the fire that consumed Nadav and Avihu came from the Holy of Holies: the resting place of the Ark. The Ark, with its fractional measurements (*midot*) teaches us that we, too, are fractional-lacking in Torah knowledge and imperfect in our refinement of character (*midot*). Nadav and Avihu thought that they had reached completion. The origin of the fire that consumed them showed that they still had work to do.

If this lesson was relevant to such great people as Nadav and Avihu, it is all the more relevant to us. Although we should take pleasure in our positive achievements, we should never take pride. We should not feel so satisfied with our accomplishments that we lose our yearning to stretch and grow further.

May we continually desire to push beyond our current level, and in the merit of this attitude, may we soon deserve to see the return of our centerpiece, the Ark, with the building of the Third Temple. © 2008 Rabbi A. Wagensberg & *aish.com*

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd there came forth fire from before G-d and devoured them [Nadav and Avihu] and they died before G-d” (Lev. 10:2).

This week's Torah portion of Shmini raises one of the most crucial questions directed at any religion, not just Judaism. How do we deal with the tragedy of an unfathomable death, the good, the best, and the brightest plucked from life like a weed in the wind? We are never more humbled than when we stand before the coffin of a loved one taken away in the bloom of youth, and all we can do is grope for words, struck dumb, dazed, utterly baffled.

After the inauguration of Aaron and his sons into the priestly service of the sanctuary, a luminous summit in early Jewish history, the text speaks of G-d's glory revealed as the fire of the Lord descends to

consume the whole burnt offering, and we can only imagine the communal ecstasy the Jewish people feel upon witnessing this fire, the signature of G-d magnified to a mass that all can behold.

Nadav and Avihu, Aaron's sons, newly anointed, then take the fire pan and offer incense before G-d. The text calls theirs a 'strange fire,' and in the midst of the personal triumph of Aaron, he is suddenly struck with two simultaneous deaths, his sons consumed by fire. From the heights of ecstasy, in a flash, the high priest is cast into a pit of potential despair. Is this not the most tragic moment of Aaron's life?

Rabbi Mecklenberg, the author of the *Ktav v-haKabbala*, seizes this incident as a way to fathom death. When the scorching fire consumes the sons of Aaron like a ram and a bull, it's an allusion to their deaths as a holy sacrifice. The Torah, he wants us to understand, implies that all death contains within it elements of sacrifice and atonement. And what appears unjust in our eyes is not necessarily unjust in the eyes of G-d.

But why now, at the moment of Aaron's greatest glory? Because during these first hours after the 7 initiatory days, the Jewish people must learn that just as within the Holy Sanctuary there are animal sacrifices, outside the Sanctuary there are also human sacrifices. It's a brutal lesson, painful and tragic, but it's a way to explain why the ones who are most pure and whole are sometimes taken from us. Of course, if we don't believe in an invisible reality, a world beyond ours, indeed, an internal world, then this perception of sacrifice is cruel. But if one accepts the statement in our Ethics of the Fathers, that this world is merely a corridor to the world to come, the notion that there are holy souls whose entry into the higher world may serve as an atonement, can be a great source of comfort to families who lose young children in acts of terror or mindless accidents. As the text in our Biblical reading clearly states, "through those who are close to Me shall I be sanctified" (Leviticus 10:3).

The midrash takes a very different approach, based upon the Biblical verse, "And (Nadav and Avihu) brought before the Lord a strange fire which He had not commanded them". (Lev. 10:1) For many of our Rabbinic Sages this indicates a transgression, with the false fire referring either to the fire of jealousy (Nadav and Avihu could hardly wait to take the places of Moses and Aaron), the fire of the Moloch idolatry, or the false and perverted passion which can often come from becoming inebriated (and the very next commandment of the Torah forbids an intoxicated Cohen from entering the Temple precincts (Lev 10: 9).

There is however a third way of seeing this entire tragic incidence. The issue is not at all the justice or lack thereof in the tragic deaths of two young people; death is the most profound mystery of life. Death itself,

almost whenever and however it comes, is always filled with frustrated goals and desires, unspoken words and feelings, and is always unfair and unjust. The important point of the story as recorded in the Bible is the manner in which Aaron responded to the deaths of his sons: "And Aaron was silent" Vayidom Aharon (Lev. 10:3). And then the Bible goes on to tell us how Aaron and the remaining sons continued to perform the Temple service. (10:12-20)

I was privileged to be present at the very first Sabbath circumcision of the Klauzemberger - Tzanz hassidim in the Bet Midrash which they established in Brooklyn New York, their first stop in America after the holocaust (They were soon to leave Brooklyn and set up new and final residence in Netanya, Israel) The Rebbe rose to speak: "My dear brothers and sisters, at every circumcision ceremony we recite the verse from Prophet Yezekiel, 'I see you are rooted in your blood (damayich), and I say unto you that by your blood you shall live, by your blood you shall live'. I would like to suggest another interpretation. The Hebrew damayich does not come from blood, dam, but rather from silence, dom, as in vayidom Aharon. There were many reasons for us to scream out in protest during and after the Holocaust. Had we done so we may very well have severed our entire relationship with our G-d and our history. We chose to remain silent and to continue planting, building and preserving. Indeed, by our silence do we live." © 2008 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

### **RABBI SHLOMO KATZ**

## **HaMa'ayan**

**W**e read in this week's parashah of the dedication of the Mishkan and the death of two of Aharon's sons. In the ensuing halachic discussions regarding the effect of this event on the sacrificial service, we read (10:20), "Moshe heard and he approved." Rashi z"l comments: "He admitted his error and was not ashamed to do so."

Is this something the Torah needs to tell us about Moshe? asks R' Leib Chasman z"l (1869-1935; rabbi in Lithuania and mashgiach of the Chevron Yeshiva). If the Torah had told us, "Moshe did not tell a lie," would we be impressed?

A similar question: The Gemara (Sotah 13a) states: "Look how Moshe loved mitzvot! At the time of the Exodus, when all of the Jewish People were collecting booty from the Egyptians, Moshe was searching for Yosef's coffin to take it out of Egypt." Could we imagine the Chafetz Chaim passing up the chance to do a mitzvah and running to collect gold and silver? Do we need to be told that Moshe preferred mitzvot to money?

The answer is that the Torah is teaching us the depth of Hashem's judgment. No action, however small, is lost when He makes an accounting. [Telling

the truth or running to do a mitzvah may not have been a "big deal" for Moshe, but Hashem rewards for it anyway.] We learn this from a verse in Kohelet (12:14), "For G-d will judge every deed-even everything hidden-whether good or evil." The Gemara (Chagigah 5a) explains: Even a minor act such as squashing a louse becomes a sin if it disgusts another person in front of whom it is done. Of course, concludes R' Chasman, if Hashem is so exacting when our minor sins are involved, how much more so can we count on Him to reward even our minor good deeds! (Ohr Yahel II p.93)



"Moshe said to Aharon: Of this did Hashem speak, saying, 'I will be sanctified through those who are nearest Me, thus I will be honored before the entire people.'" (Vayikra 10:3)

R' Yaakov Kranz z"l (1741-1804; the Dubno Maggid) explains that this verse contrasts Hashem's expectations of the righteous with His expectations from the "ordinary" Jew. Those closest to Hashem are held to a standard that measures whether they sanctify Him through every deed; if they do not, they are judged harshly, as Aharon's sons Nadav and Avihu were. In contrast, "ordinary" Jews are measured by whether they honor Him by adhering, at a minimum, to the letter of the law.

R' Kranz explains further that there are three reasons why G-d holds the righteous to exacting standards. The first may be understood by means of a parable in which two subjects of a king committed the same offense against their ruler. One offender was a peasant while the other was one of the king's advisors. Would we not expect the king to judge his advisor more harshly because the advisor should have had a greater reverence for the king after being granted access to the throne? Similarly, one who has been blessed with closeness to Hashem is held to a higher standard than is one who is distant from Hashem.

Second, others view one who is close to Hashem as a role model. When he sins, he not only violates the law, he causes others to do so. This is not true when an "ordinary" Jew sins.

Third, R' Kranz writes, not all neshamot / souls originate from the same "level." Those that come from a higher source are more delicate, so-to-speak. Therefore, they are more prone to being damaged by even minor sins, just as a delicate piece of equipment is more susceptible to damage from minute dust particles and as a white garment is more susceptible to permanent damage from small stains. This is alluded to by the verse (Kohelet 1:18), "For with much wisdom comes much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases pain." (Sefer Ha'middot: Sha'ar Ha'yirah chapter 12) © 2008 *Rabbi S. Katz & torah.org*