

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

The second half of Exodus and the first part of Leviticus form a carefully structured narrative. The Israelites are commanded to construct a sanctuary. They carry out the command. This is followed by an account of sacrifices to be offered there. Then, in the first part of today's sedra, the cohanim, the priests, are inducted into office.

What happens next, though, is unexpected: the dietary laws, a list of permitted and forbidden species, animals, fish and birds. What is the logic of these laws? And why are they placed here? What is their connection with the sanctuary?

The late R. Elie Munk (The Call of the Torah, vol. 2, p. 99) offered a fascinating suggestion. As we have mentioned before in these studies, the sanctuary was a human counterpart of the cosmos. Several key words in the biblical account of its construction are also key words in the narrative of creation at the beginning of Genesis. The Talmud (Megillah 10b) says about the completion of the sanctuary, that "On that day there was joy before the Holy One blessed be He as on the day when heaven and earth were created." The universe is the home G-d made for man. The sanctuary was the home human beings made for G-d.

R. Munk reminds us that the first command G-d gave the first human was a dietary law. "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." The dietary laws in Shmini parallel the prohibition given to Adam. As then, so now, a new era in the spiritual history of humankind, preceded by an act of creation, is marked by laws about what one may and may not eat.

Why? As with sex, so with eating: these are the most primal activities, shared with many other forms of life. Without sex there is no continuation of the species. Without food, even the individual cannot survive. These, therefore, have been the focus of radically different cultures. On the one hand there are hedonistic cultures in which food and sex are seen as pleasures and pursued as such. On the other are ascetic cultures-

marked by monastic seclusion-in which sex is avoided and eating kept to a minimum. The former emphasize the body, the latter the soul. Judaism, by contrast, sees the human situation in terms of integration and balance. We are body and soul. Hence the Judaic imperative, neither hedonistic nor ascetic, but transformative. We are commanded to sanctify the activities of eating and sex. From this flow the dietary laws and the laws of family purity (niddah and mikveh), two key elements of kedushah, the life of holiness.

However, we can go further. Genesis 1 is not the only account of creation in Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible. There are several others. One is contained in the last chapters of the Book of Job. It is this that deserves close attention.

Job is the paradigm of the righteous individual who suffers. He loses all he has, for no apparent reason. His companions tell him that he must have sinned. Only this can reconcile his fate with justice. Job maintains his innocence and demands a hearing in the heavenly tribunal. For some 37 chapters the argument rages, then in chapter 38 G-d addresses Job "out of the whirlwind". G-d offers no answers. Instead, for four chapters, He asks questions of His own, rhetorical questions that have no answer: "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?... Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?... Does the rain have a father?... From whose womb comes the ice?"

G-d shows Job the whole panoply of creation, but it is a very different view of the universe than that set out in Genesis 1-2. There the centre of the narrative is the human person. He/she is created last; made in G-d's image; given dominion over all that lives. In Job 38-41 we see not an anthropocentric, but a theocentric, universe. Job is the only person in Tanakh who sees the world, as it were, from G-d's point of view.

Particularly striking is the way these chapters deal with the animal kingdom. What Job sees are not domestic animals, but wild, untameable creatures, magnificent in their strength and beauty, living far from and utterly indifferent to humankind: "Do you give the horse his strength or clothe his neck with a flowing mane? Do you make him leap like a locust, striking terror with his proud snorting?... Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom and spread his wings toward the south? Does the eagle soar at your command and build his nest on high?... Can you pull in the leviathan with a fishhook or tie down his tongue with a rope? Can you

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put a cord through his nose or pierce his jaw with a hook?... Nothing on earth is his equal-a creature without fear. He looks down on all that are haughty; he is king over all that are proud."

This is the most radically non-anthropocentric passage in the Hebrew Bible. It tells us that man is not the centre of the universe, nor are we the measure of all things. Some of the most glorious aspects of nature have nothing to do with human needs, and everything to do with the Divine creation of diversity. One of the few Jewish thinkers to state this clearly was Moses Maimonides: "I consider the following opinion as most correct according to the teaching of the Bible and the results of philosophy, namely that the universe does not exist for man's sake, but that each being insists for its own sake, and not because of some other thing. Thus we believe in Creation, and yet need not inquire what purpose is served by each species of existing things, because we assume that G-d created all parts of the universe by His will; some for their own sake, and some for the sake of other beings..." (Guide for the Perplexed, III:13).

And again: "Consider how vast are the dimensions and how great the number of these corporeal beings. If the whole of the earth would not constitute even the smallest part of the sphere of the fixed stars, what is the relation of the human species to all these created things, and how can any of us imagine that they exist for his sake and that they are instruments for his benefit?" (Guide for the Perplexed, III:14)

We now understand what is at stake in the prohibition of certain species of animals, birds and fish, many of them predators like the creatures described in Job 38-41. They exist for their own sake, not for the sake of humankind. The vast universe, and earth itself with the myriad species it contains, has an integrity of its own. Yes, after the Flood, G-d gave humans permission to eat meat, but this was a concession, as if to say: Kill if you must, but let it be animals, not other humans, that you kill.

With His covenant with the Israelites, G-d invites humanity to begin a new chapter in history. This is not yet the Garden of Eden, paradise regained. But, with the construction of the sanctuary-a symbolic home for the Divine presence on earth-something new has begun. One sign of this is the fact that the Israelites are not permitted to kill any and every life-form for food.

Some species must be protected, given their freedom, granted their integrity, left unsubjected to human devices and desires. The new creation- the sanctuary-marks a new dignity for the old creation-especially its wild, untamed creatures. Not everything in the universe was made for human consumption. © 2012 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## Wein Online

**T**he parsha deals with the eighth day of the dedication of the Mishkan. In general it can be stated that the eighth day after any event can be a time of challenge. The eighth day of life is the day of circumcision of male Jewish children. The eighth day - the day after the week of rejoicing of a young newly married couple - was and is the day when real married life with all of its joys and challenges begins.

The eighth day after the beginning of the holiday of Pesach in Israel is the day when we return to our ordinary lives and tasks and many times that is a moment of at least temporary depression. And here in the parsha the eighth day is transformed from the day of joy and supreme attainment to one of tragedy and silence.

The eighth day is a difficult day. But the main lesson here is that life is in reality a series of 'eighth days.' The eighth day is unpredictable, it can bring pain and sadness but it can also be inspiring and joyful, productive and worthy. So the eighth day syndrome has become a metaphor for life in general and certainly for Jewish life particularly.

Because of the potential problems and difficulties that the eighth day may bring, the Torah begins the parsha with the word "vayehi" which is not necessarily an expression of happiness. Here it will refer to the untimely deaths of the two sons of Aharon. But in general it serves as a warning to humans to view life cautiously and realistically. The Torah always teaches us to drive defensively in all areas of living.

Aharon's reaction to the tragedy that has befallen him is noteworthy. The Torah emphasizes that he keep silent. Many times events occur in human lives that are so shocking, sudden and overwhelming that humans are left speechless. Silence then is really a reflex reaction. But here the Torah records Aharon's silence as an act of bravery, restraint and holiness and not as a reflex reaction to the destruction of half of his family.

It indicates that Aharon had plenty he could have said and could have taken Heaven to task, so to speak, but instead he himself chose to remain silent. The Talmud in many instances advocates the supremacy of silence over complaint, in fact over unnecessary speech generally. There is much to complain about from our human viewpoint of life and its events. Heaven however states that the fact that we are

alive and functioning should be sufficient to stifle any complaints.

This hard judgment is also one of the primary lessons of the eighth day. Aharon's unspoken heartbroken complaint and his unanswered, in fact unasked, question hang in the air of Jewish history - mysterious and unfathomable. This also is true of all eighth day challenges that face us - the righteous and faithful shoulder on.

The great Rebbe of Kotzk said famously: "For the believer there are no questions; for the non-believer there are no answers." We are all eighth day Jews. Let us also shoulder on to build the Jewish people in strength, compassion and belief. © 2012 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

“**A**nd Aaron was silent." ("Vayidom Aharon lev.") (10:3) In the midst of the joyous celebration dedicating the desert Sanctuary fire came out from before the Lord and devoured Nadav and Avihu, the two sons of Aaron, the High Priest. "And Moses said to Aaron, 'that is what the Lord has said, saying that through those closest to Me shall I be sanctified...'”(Lev.10:3). Rashi quotes the following words which the rabbis attribute to Moses: "Moses said to Aaron, 'Aaron my brother, I know that this Temple Sanctuary will have to be sanctified by beloved friends of the Divine, and I thought that it would be either through you or through me. Now I see that they (Nadav and Avihu) were greater than both me and you'...."

According to this view, Nadav and Avihu were saintly individuals; worthy of being sacrificed on the altar of the desert Sanctuary, "VaYidom Aaron", and Aaron silently acquiesced to G-d's will. But why did the desert Sanctuary, and by extension any great advance of the Jewish nation, have to be dedicated by the deaths of great Jewish personalities? Why must the pages of our glorious history be drenched in the blood of holy martyrs and soaked by the tears of mourners they leave behind?

The only answer I can give to this agonizing question of lamah - why? - is the one word answer that our Israeli children like to give to our questions about why they do what they do, "kakha", that is how it is. Why must sacrifice be a necessary condition for redemption?

The pattern may be discerned as far back as the Covenant between the Pieces, in which G-d guarantees Abram eternal seed (Gen 15:1-6) and the land of Israel (15:7). After this, a great fear descends upon Abram as he is told that his seed will be strangers in a strange land where they will be afflicted and enslaved until they leave, freed and enriched. G-d then

commands Abram to circumcise himself and his entire male household. The blood of the covenant is thus built into the very male organ of propagation (Gen 17); the price of our nationhood is blood, sacrifice and affliction.

At our Passover Seder, the celebration of our national birth, we retell the tale of our initial march from servitude to freedom in the words of the fully liberated Jew bringing his first fruits to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem: "My father, (Jacob), was almost destroyed by the Aramean (Laban), and he went down to Egypt, and he became there a great mighty and populous (rav) nation" (Deut 26:5). The author of the Passover Haggadah then explicates the text with the description presented by the prophet Ezekiel (16:7): "I caused you to be populous (revavah) even as the vegetation of the field, and you did increase and grow up and you came to excellent beauty. Your breasts were fashioned and your hair was grown - yet you were naked and bare".

The Hebrews in Egypt were numerous and powerful, but empty and bare of merit, of true character and courage. To achieve this, they had to undergo the suffering of Egyptian enslavement, having their male babies cast into the Nile. They had to place their lives on the line by sacrificing the "god" of the Egyptians to the G-d of Israel and the world. They had to place the blood of this sacrifice on their doorposts and they had to undergo circumcision, to demonstrate their readiness to shed blood for freedom, for independence, and for their right to worship G-d in their own way.

With all of this in mind, the author of the Haggadah returns to Ezekiel (16:6): "And I passed over you, and I saw that you were rooted in your blood, and I say to you by that blood shall you live (the blood of circumcision)." It is your willingness to sacrifice for your ideals that make you worthy of emulation, that made you a special and "chosen" people!

And so the author of the Haggadah then returns to Biblical description of Hebrew suffering in Egypt, a suffering which was meant to teach us to "love the other, the stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

Rabbi Yisrael Prager tells how a Nazi guard in the Vilna ghetto interrupted a secret nocturnal matzoh baking, causing the blood of the Jewish victims to mix with the dough of the baking matzot. The Rabbi cried out, "Behold we are prepared and ready to perform the commandment of the blood of the paschal sacrifice, the blood of the matzot which symbolize the paschal sacrifice!" As he concluded his blessing, his blood too was mixed with the baking matzot.

Lamah? Why such necessary sacrifice? Kakha, because so it is, because such is the inscrutable will of the Almighty. And "ashreiha'am she kakhah lo", happy is the nation that can say kakhah, happy is the nation which understands that its sacrifices are for the sake of the Almighty, for the purification of their nation, for the world message that freedom and the absolute value that every human being is created in G-d's image. And

that these are values worth fighting for, values worth committing blood for. May it be G-d's will that we now begin our exit from enslavement and our entry into redemption, for us and the entire world. © 2012 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

### **RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

## **Haftorah**

**T**his week we read a special Haftorah portion in light of the fact that this Shabbos is Erev Rosh Chodesh. This particular segment deals with the heartbreaking separation of Yonason from his dearest and most beloved friend Dovid and Dovid's secret escape from the threatening wrath of Shaul Hamelech. Shaul, then acting as king over Israel, had the mistaken impression that Dovid was a threat to his reign and viewed him as a rebel who deserved, according to Torah law, to be executed. Yonasan the king's son, maintained an entirely different outlook on the matter and idolized Dovid's accomplishments to the point of yearning for Dovid to assume the mantle of leadership over Israel. These diametrically opposing views finally came to a head when the king publicly denounced his son for his disgraceful attitude. Yonasan read his father's message efficiently and secretly informed Dovid to flee for his life. After an emotional scene of departure, Yonasan sent Dovid away in peace and reinstated their vow that nothing would ever separate the two families from each other.

The timely reading of this particular segment and the occurrence of its events around Rosh Chodesh suggest a corollary between the reign of Dovid Hamelech and Rosh Chodesh. Indeed we find many customs related to the new moon that reinforce this association. Our Chazal in Sanhedrin 42a instituted that we recite a blessing over the new moon each month. The nature of this Mitzvah is to recognize the orbit of the moon and its exact and affixed progression and digression beginning from a small crescent, extending to a full moon and then decreasing and disappearing. Yet, in the midst of the recital we say with excitement, "Dovid, King over Israel is alive and enduring". This peculiar practice suggests that the moon and King Dovid's reign have much in common. Chazal (Pesikta Rabasi 15) tell us that in actuality, King Dovid's reign was patterned exactly according to the moon. The moon comes to its fullest appearance on the fifteenth day, and then begins its gradual decline until it totally disappears. Once the moon is completely out of sight, it then begins its gradual reappearance. Chazal explain that the reign of the House of Dovid resembled the appearance and disappearance of the moon. Likened to the moon, the glory of Israel's reign slowly began to appear in the time of Avrohom Avinu and developed to its fullest maturity fifteen generations later in the era of Shlomo Hamelech, Dovid's son. From that point onwards the monarchy, like the moon, began its gradual

descent until its total disappearance fifteen kings later during the era of Tzidkiyahu Hamelech. The Maharsha (Sanhedrin 38a) develops this thought and cites that even within the actual dynasty of King Dovid there were thirty figureheads. In fact, the household of Dovid enjoyed fifteen kings until its downfall during the reign of Tzidkiyahu Hamelech. But even after that point there existed a structure of rulership from the House of Dovid for many generations later. The Midrash concludes that when the reign of Dovid will totally disappear, the time will be ripe for the gradual appearance of Moshiach.

We conclude the prayers over the new moon with a special request that Hashem restore the moon to its perfect brilliance and then we recite the following passage "And the Jewish People will seek Hashem and their King Dovid". Once again we discover King Dovid as an integral part of our Rosh Chodesh service. Our Chazal (see Rashi Breishis 1:15) teach us that the moon was originally created with the same brilliance as that of the sun. However, the light of the moon was decreased and will remain that way until the era of Moshiach. In this prayer the brilliance of the moon is likened to the glorious reign of Dovid Hamelech. We entreat Hashem to restore the moon to its original brilliance and likewise to restore the reign of Dovid Hamelech to its original splendor. The insightful words of the Maharsha are quoted in completion of this thought that the numerical value of the above cited phrase "Dovid, King over Israel..." equals the exact value of the words "Rosh Chodesh".

We can now appreciate the lesson of this week's haftorah and its encouraging theme. From the view of an outsider the events of the haftorah are terribly disheartening. Dovid had continuously demonstrated remarkable strengths and leadership qualities throughout his faithful years serving as Shaul Hamelech's general. Although Yonasan had been destined to be Shaul's successor, Dovid's superb qualities convinced even Yonasan to step aside and allow Dovid to rise to power. Now, because of King Shaul's grave misunderstanding, all must be forfeited and Dovid's glorious career must come to an abrupt end. Yet, Yonasan remains steadfast and is totally convinced that justice will prevail and Dovid will eventually rise to his well deserved position of authority. The moon seems to be disappearing, but Yonasan knows that it will reappear in its proper time. He, therefore reinstates his pact with Dovid (see Malbim 20:13,14) that when he rises to his position of leadership never to forget the household of Yonasan and his father. We draw our faith from these words and, as we look towards the moon, we express our total faith in Hashem. We recognize that the disappearance of the Kingdom of Israel, like the moon, is a guaranteed indication of its reappearance and we entreat Hashem to restore the Kingdom of Dovid to its original glory and splendor, speedily in our days. © 2012 *D. Siegel & torah.org*

RABBI YISROEL CINER

## Parsha Insights

**T**his week we read the parsha of Shemini. "Va'y'hee ba'yom ha'shmini (And it was on the eighth day) [9:1]." Rashi explains that this was the eighth day of the consecration of the Mishkan. Whereas during each of the first seven days, Moshe would build and then disassemble the Mishkan in order to familiarize himself with it, on this day the Mishkan was erected and remained as such.

Our parsha then goes on to discuss the sacrifices that were brought on that day and ultimately the "aish zarah (foreign, uncommanded flame)[10:1]" brought by Nadav and Avihu, two of Aharon's sons. Two threads of fire emerged from the Holy of Holies, entered through their nostrils and consumed their souls. Moshe tells Aharon: "I knew that there would be a sanctification of the Mishkan through the death of the ones closest to Hashem and I thought it would be either you or I. Now that this sanctification has come through them I realize that they were greater than you and I [Medrash quoted by Rashi 10:3]."

We've explained earlier that, being a composite of a spiritual being and a physical being, we need to experience events on different realms. Whereas the 'malach (angel)' of the person was influenced by the revelation of the Shechina (Hashem's Holy Presence) at the Mishkan, the physical aspect couldn't be reasoned with. It needed to be frightened by the awesome power of Hashem. To witness that in the Mishkan, in the presence of Hashem, no sin would be overlooked, even when performed by the greatest of tzadikim. The greater the tzadik, the greater the sanctification. Moshe understood that if they were chosen for the sanctification, then they were the greatest.

We need to understand how they could have been greater than Moshe when we see that Moshe was chosen to lead the Exodus, to split the sea, to receive the Torah, etc.

The Talmud [Bava Basra 10:] tells of what we now call a near death encounter. Rav Yosef the son of Rav Yehoshua was 'dead' for a short period of time and then was resuscitated. To his fathers question of what did he see, he responded: "I saw an olam hafuch (an upside down world). The elyonim ('high' people) were low and the tachtonim ('low' people) were high." "You saw an olam barur (a clear world)!", was his father's response.

Rashi there explains what he saw in the following manner. The people who were 'high' in this world due to their wealth were in a lowly position in the next world. The poor who were treated lowly in this world were the important ones in the next. His father responded that there he saw with clarity each person's true state.

Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l asked how could Rav Yosef have called what he saw in the next world 'upside down'? Isn't it obvious that here in this world, with our physical eyes, we are very easily misled by the revealed actions of a person. We see the outer shell. We don't see with clarity. Why did he call it an upside down world?

He explains the Talmud differently. The true elyonim ('high' people) of this world were considered to be the elyonim of the next and the tachtonim ('lowly' people) of this world were considered to be the tachtonim of the next. Yet, these elyonim were lower than the tachtonim! It truly was an olam hafuch (upside down world)! He couldn't understand why Hashem had arranged the world of truth in such a fashion.

His father explained that what he had seen was an olam barur (a clear world). Hashem only demands from a person that which is within that individual person's ability. Those with lesser abilities and more modest potential are not expected to 'accomplish' as much as others. If they maximize their potentials to fulfill the purpose for which they were sent to this world, even if they'll actually 'accomplish' less-performing less ma'asim tovim (good acts), studying less Torah-they will truly be the elyonim in the world of clarity. Those 'high' people who might have 'accomplished' more but were blessed with tremendous abilities which weren't used to their fullest, those elyonim will be the tachtonim in the next world.

With that we can understand how those who might not have the most auspicious list of accomplishments might be considered greater than others who boast such a list. Perhaps, this could explain how Nadav and Avihu were greater than Moshe and Aharon.

Living in a rather uniform community, I had a relatively rare treat this past YomTov (holiday). We had received a phone call asking if we'd host a family for one of the meals. We agreed to do so. Our guests had been brought up in the former Soviet Union and had emigrated to the United States about nine years ago when they were in their early thirties. Hearing their story, getting a sense for the struggles and challenges that they had faced and still face in their growing observance, and feeling their excitement and their honesty in regard to their Judaism was truly an exhilarating experience for my whole family. As he kept referring to me as 'Rabbi', I kept thinking that here we have a real case of tachtonim being the elyonim and elyonim being the tachtonim.

One of my Rabbeim z"l had children who were somewhat challenged. Every year he would devote one of his Friday night talks to discuss these boys. Within their limited capacities, these two young men are incredibly motivated and passionate about their Judaism. I often see one sitting in the Beis Medrash (study hall) with a volume of the Talmud before him, flipping through the pages, bothered by a question here

which is seemingly answered by a later passage. On the outside, he seems to be studying like all the others. Those who know him, know that he's simply parroting their actions because there is nothing more important and precious to him than the incomprehensible books that lay before him.

This Rav, in his talk, would discuss how Hashem appoints us as parents to be the guardians of the different neshamos (souls) that he sends to this world. We have no say in the type of neshama that we are entrusted with. We take those children and do as much as we can to help them connect to and form a true relationship with Hashem. If we can help them to use their abilities to the fullest then they will be the true elyonim.

This lesson was even more vividly taught to me by his wife, a few weeks after he had passed from this world. Parents of a former student of mine had been visiting me. This Rav had also been a Rebbe of this student and had been instrumental in convincing this student to attend the Yeshiva. I suggested to the parents that they should go and also visit the Rebbetzin. They were very hesitant being that it was so close to the death of her husband. After I had urged them, explaining to them that it would mean a lot to her, they agreed on the condition that I'd accompany them.

As we were visiting, one of these sons walked out of the shower wearing just a robe and looking like a total mess. It was clearly a very awkward situation. Without batting an eyelash, this woman put her arm around his shoulder, turned to this very wealthy, polished and classy couple and proudly said: "I'd like to introduce you to my son". She made the introductions and the conversation then continued.

I was totally blown away. She had such a clear understanding that this child was Hashem's child. She didn't make him-Hashem did. There was nothing to be ashamed or embarrassed about. She was now raising this child (alone) to be a proper servant of Hashem to the best of his abilities. She was doing it in an extraordinarily successful way.

I believe that for the rest of my life I'll remember her voice proudly saying: "Mr. and Mrs., this is my son". She was wise and insightful enough to be proud. In her eyes, she was raising a true elyon. © 2012 Rabbi Y. Ciner and torah.org

### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

## **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**A**mong the directions given in this week's portion is a command to Aaron the High Priest by G-d not to drink wine before officiating in the Tabernacle. (Leviticus 10:9)

Rashi explains the prohibition to mean that the priest "[may not drink] wine to such an extent that it has an intoxicating effect." Indeed, an opinion in the Talmud maintains that one has violated this prohibition only if an

intoxicating wine of at least a re'vi'it — approximately 4-6 fluid ounces has been consumed. (Keritot 13b) In such a state, Rambam adds that the priests could go astray by entertaining some improper thoughts or by becoming unclear and erring in a matter of law, thus violating the spirit of the Tabernacle rite.

In moderation, however, drinking is permissible. In fact, wine plays a crucial role in virtually every rite of passage — i.e. circumcision, marriage ceremony. And, wine is used to usher in most important days of our calendar year — i.e. Shabbat, Yom Tov, etc. Why is this so?

It can be suggested that wine is the symbol of joy. Therefore, in proper measure, it is drunk on the happiest of occasions and on the happiest of days.

Also, using wine on holy occasions teaches that while wine can intoxicate, when imbibed in moderate amounts and for lofty purposes, it can sanctify. Hence, we drink wine during kiddush and kiddushin (the marriage ceremony). Not coincidentally, both of these terms come from the word kadosh, holy. What this teaches is that everything in the world, even that which has the potential to be destructive, can be used for the good and even for the holy.

There is another explanation that is mystical in nature. Adam and Eve disobeyed G-d when they drank wine squeezed from grapes. Every Shabbat, and, for that matter, at other religious ceremonies, we drink wine as a way of fixing that mistake. In Eden, Adam and Eve drank wine improperly. On Shabbat we "return" to Eden, but in Eden where we celebrate and drink wine in accordance with the will of G-d.

Finally, wine can alter the senses; it has the capacity to change our mood and demeanor. It is, therefore, transformative in nature. Thus, wine is drunk when we go through important spiritual moments of transition, like when moving from the weekdays to Shabbat, or when experiencing a rites de passage.

Still, even as the Torah speaks openly about the holy potential of wine, it warns us of its deleterious effects. The fact that the Torah warns us about intoxication means that substance abuse, including alcoholism, is a human reality. As a religion that advocates the use of wine in moderation, we must realize that alcohol abuse is also a very real Jewish problem. We must never overlook this reality and make religious excuses for it. We have the responsibility to address it head-on while reaching out to embrace and show endless care and love for those afflicted with this terrible disease.

In this way we will show a true and real relationship with the wonderful and, at the same time, destructive nature of wine © 2003 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.

**SHLOMO KATZ**

## Hama'ayan

In this week's parashah, we read of the dedication of the mishkan. It was at this time that Hashem's presence came to rest on the handiwork of Bnei Yisrael - the Tabernacle.

As a prelude to this event, Moshe instructed the people: "This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do; then the glory of Hashem will appear to you." Based on this verse, R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (long-time rabbi of Yerushalayim's Sha'arei Chesed neighborhood and rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav; died 1952) taught:

Man is born with the drive to attain a lofty level. However, each person applies this drive where his heart leads him - some seek wealth, some, honor, etc. In reality, however, the only thing that can satisfy the soul is spiritual accomplishment. The soul desires that "the glory of Hashem will appear to [it]."

Many people think that their own need for fulfillment is sufficient impetus to attain lofty spiritual levels. In fact, one can reach these levels only if his inspiration is the fact that Hashem so commanded. Why? Because one who acts out of his own need for fulfillment also sets his own goals. He is not reaching for Hashem, but for something he himself has created. (This is what Chazal meant by the adage, "One who is commanded and acts is greater than one who is not commanded and acts.")

This is what Moshe told the people! "This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do; then the glory of Hashem will appear to you." If your acts are based solely on Hashem's commandments, only then will the glory of Hashem appear to you. Thus the midrash comments on this verse: "Abolish that evil inclination and be of one mind and one heart to serve Hashem. Just as He is One, so your service of Him should be one." (Mei Marom V p.182)

"For I am Hashem Who elevates you from the land of Egypt to be a G-d unto you . . ." (11:45)

With this verse, the Torah closes out the laws of kashrut. Indeed, the midrash states that if one denies the laws of kashrut, he also denies the Exodus. What is the relationship of the Exodus to kashrut?

R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai z"l ("Chida"; died 1806) explains: There are two types of impurity that can affect a person - impurity that enters a person and impurity that surrounds a person. An example of the former is non-kosher food; an example of the latter is idolatry.

Our sages teach that Hashem hurried Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt because they were about to become inextricably mired in the impurity of Egypt. Chida explains that our ancestors had reached the stage where the external impurity of Egypt was about to

become an inherent part of their beings. Hashem took Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt before the impurity could enter them. How then can one allow non-kosher food to enter his body? This is possible only if one denies the Exodus! (Quoted in Torat Ha'Chida)

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**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd the sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, each took their fire-pan and they put fire (burning coals) on them, and they put incense upon it, and they brought an unauthorized fire to G-d, which they had not been commanded" (Vayikra 10:1). The Torah doesn't say that they brought "unauthorized incense," but that they brought an "unauthorized fire." The implication is that the incense itself wasn't problematic; only the fire used to burn it was. Being that incense offerings cannot be brought voluntarily or privately (Menachos 50a), and doing so without specific permission can be extremely dangerous (as evidenced by the deaths of the 250 leaders who sided with Korach, see Bamidbar 16:35), we would have expected Nadav and Avihu's incense offering to at least be included in the description of what they did wrong. Yet, the Torah only rebukes them for bringing an unauthorized fire, without mentioning the incense offering being unauthorized.

It could be suggested that the incense only became an offering when it was placed upon the fire, and was what made it an unauthorized fire and/or became part of the unauthorized fire, thereby alleviating any need to specify the incense itself being problematic (since it was included in the "fire"). However, Ramban tells us that by not mentioning the incense (only the fire) the Torah is informing us what their sin was. Obviously, Ramban does not consider the expression "unauthorized fire" to be including the incense that was placed upon it. Why doesn't the Torah mention that the incense was (also) unauthorized?

Ramban explains Nadav and Avihu's sin from a Kabbalistic perspective; I'm not going to pretend to understand what he is hinting to. Nevertheless, the gist of his explanation (see Rikanti) is that Nadav and Avihu directed their offering to G-d's attribute of justice without uniting it with all of G-d's other attributes and directing it to G-d Himself. This attribute (of justice) is described as "fire;" Nadav and Avihu "bringing an unauthorized fire" refers to getting G-d angry because they directed their offering only to His attribute of justice, not to the physical fire used to ignite the incense. Since the "unauthorized fire" is not a reference to the offering itself, but to Whom (or What) it was offered, there is no reason to mention the problem of bringing an incense offering that was not allowed to be brought.

Netziv also redirects the term "unauthorized fire" away from the act that Nadav and Avihu did,

explaining "via d'rash" that the "fire" refers to their "burning desire" to get closer to G-d, which led them to try to do so in an inappropriate manner (bringing incense in a way that was inappropriate). Again, once the term "unauthorized fire" does not refer to what was done, not mentioning the incense does not imply that the incense itself was not problematic.

Now that we've presented possible approaches based on "sod" ("secrets," referring to Kabbalah) and "d'rash" (exegetical deductions), I would like to explore some possibilities based on "p'shat" (the plain, simple meaning). However, since there are different ways to explain what Nadav and Avihu did (specifically where they offered the incense), even if we stick with "p'shat" (that the "unauthorized fire" refers to the physical fire they used to burn the incense), different "p'shatim" need to be presented based on each of the possibilities.

Rashi (16:1, see also Ibn Ezra) is among the commentators who say that Nadav and Avihu brought the incense into the inner sanctum (the "Kodesh haKadashim"). From a technical standpoint, if they entered the "Holy of Holies" with burning incense on their fire-pans, the first item that entered (assuming they didn't walk in backwards) would have been the burning coals at the edge of their fire-pans. If sticking the fire-pans into the inner sanctum was enough of a violation of this holy space that they deserved punishment, even if they didn't enter it themselves, and even if the part of the fire-pan where the incense was burning didn't enter it (and it's possible that the "G-dly fire" struck them before they had a chance to enter any further), it would be completely accurate to describe the cause of their punishment to have been "bringing an unauthorized fire close to G-d" without mentioning the incense (or themselves).

From another perspective, the prohibition against entering the inner sanctum "at any time" (16:2) was not communicated until after Nadav and Avihu had died, so they couldn't have been punished for doing something that had not yet been forbidden. Bearing in mind that offering incense was necessary before entering the inner sanctum (16:12-13), and that on the "eighth day," when Nadav and Avihu brought the "unauthorized fire," they had the status of Kohanim Gedolim (which is why Elazar and Isamar couldn't mourn their brothers' deaths, see Chizkuni on 10:7), and that the offerings brought on that day were similar to those brought on Yom Kippur, giving it the status of a pseudo-Yom Kippur, it is possible that Nadav and Avihu bringing incense into the inner sanctum was not what they were punished for. If the problem was only the source of the fire used to burn the incense, not the act of bringing incense itself, the Torah's wording is very exact. They were punished for bring an unauthorized fire; the incense itself was not yet unauthorized.

Almost always, incense is only offered on the Golden Altar (also referred to as "the Incense Altar"), which is located in the Mishkan (in the same section as

the Menorah and the Shulchan), and according to many commentators this is where Nadav and Avihu offered incense. Some (Rashbam and Chizkuni) say that they tried to offer incense before the G-dly fire consumed the offerings on the Outer Altar (the "Copper Altar"). [As a matter of fact, they say it was this same fire, which originated from the inner sanctum (after it descended from heaven, see Meseches Midos) and traveled through the Mishkan towards the Outer Altar (where it consumed the offerings) that consumed Nadav and Avihu on its way out.] If the "regular" morning incense hadn't been brought yet, placing incense on the Incense Altar would not be a problem; it would only be putting that incense on "a fire that was not commanded" (whether it was "not commanded" because of the source of the fire or "not commanded" because they shouldn't be the ones burning the incense) that was "unauthorized." Since the incense wasn't the part that wasn't authorized, the Torah only mentioned the "unauthorized fire."

Even if Nadav and Avihu didn't sin until after the offerings on the Outer Altar had been consumed by the G-dly fire, and the morning incense had either already been offered or wasn't supposed to be offered that first morning (with the afternoon incense being the inaugural incense offering), there may have been nothing wrong with putting incense on the Golden Altar in preparation for the afternoon incense offering. If it was only burning it prematurely that was problematic, it was the "fire" part that was "unauthorized," not the incense part.

Tosfos (Menachos 50b) says that Nadav and Avihu put their incense on the Outer Altar. Even though the incense offering is never brought on the Outer Altar, and individuals can never bring personal incense offerings, there was a temporary exception made during the first 12 days of the Mishkan's operation, when the Tribal Chiefs inaugurated the Mishkan (one head of Tribe per day) with their personal offerings, including personal incense offerings. [See Meshech Chochmu, who suggests that although mistaken, Nadav and Avihu had reason to think that on that "eighth day" the Outer Altar had the same status as the Inner (Incense) Altar.] It is possible that Nadav and Avihu had a reaction similar to their father, who was jealous that his Tribe did not partake in the Chanukas haMishkan (see Rashi on Bamidbar 8:2). Whether Nadav and Avihu saw Nachshon ben Aminadav bring his offerings (Bamidbar 7:12), including incense (7:14) before they brought theirs, or saw the 12 Tribal Chiefs try to bring theirs on that first day before G-d told Moshe that they should bring them one day at a time (7:10-11), the notion of bringing a personal incense offering on the Outer Altar on the "eighth day" was not out of line, and they had reason to believe that the same dispensation that was granted to Nachshon (and the other Tribal Chiefs) would apply to them as well. It wasn't the incense, per se, that was the problem, it was the way they brought it, using an "unauthorized fire." © 2012 Rabbi D. Kramer