

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

It should have been a day of joy. The Israelites had completed the mishkan, the sanctuary. For seven days Moses had made preparations for its consecration. (As described in Exodus 40.) Now on the eighth day -- the first of Nisan, (see Ex. 40:2) one year to the day since the Israelites had received their first command two weeks prior to the exodus -- the service of the sanctuary was about to begin. The sages say that it was in heaven the most joyous day since creation. (Megillah 10b)

But tragedy struck. The two elder sons of Aaron "offered a strange fire, that had not been commanded" (Lev. 10:1) and the fire from heaven that should have consumed the sacrifices consumed them as well. They died. Aaron's joy turned to mourning. Vayidom Aharon, "And Aaron was silent (10:3). The man who had been Moses' spokesman could not longer speak. Words turned to ash in his mouth.

There is much in this episode that is hard to understand, much that has to do with the concept of holiness and the powerful energies it released that, like nuclear power today, could be deadly dangerous if not properly used. But there is also a more human story about two approaches to leadership that still resonates with us today.

First there is the story about Aaron. We read about how Moses told him to begin his role as high priest. "Moses [then] said to Aaron, 'Approach the altar, and prepare your sin offering and burnt offering, thus atoning for you and the people. Then prepare the people's offering to atone for them, as G-d has commanded'" (Lev. 9:7).

The sages sensed a nuance in the words, "Approach the altar," as if Aaron was standing at a distance from it, reluctant to come near. They said: "Initially Aaron was ashamed to come close. Moses said to him, 'Do not be ashamed. This is what you have been chosen to do.'" (Rashi to Lev. 9:7, quoting Sifra)

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated in memory of
Bubbie Boxer
Yocha bas Isser z"l
by her children, grandchildren
and great grandchildren
May her neshama have an aliyah!

Why was Aaron ashamed? Tradition gave two explanations, both brought by Nahmanides in his commentary to the Torah. The first is that Aaron was simply overwhelmed by trepidation at coming so close to the Divine presence. The rabbis likened it to the bride of a king, nervous at entering the bridal chamber for the first time.

The second is that Aaron, seeing the "horns" of the altar, was reminded of the Golden Calf, his great sin. How could he, who had played a key role in that terrible event, now take on the role of atoning for the people's sins? That surely demanded an innocence he no longer had. Moses had to remind him that it was precisely to atone for sins that the altar had been made, and the fact that he had been chosen by G-d to be high priest was an unequivocal sign that he had been forgiven.

There is perhaps a third explanation, albeit less spiritual. Until now Aaron had been in all respects second to Moses. Yes, he had been at his side throughout, helping him speak and lead. But there is vast psychological difference between being second-in-command, and being a leader in your own right. We probably all know of examples of people who quite readily serve in an assisting capacity but who are terrified at the prospect of leading on their own.

Whichever explanation is true -- and perhaps they all are -- Aaron was reticent at taking on his new role, and Moses had to give him confidence. "This is what you have been chosen for."

The other story is the tragic one, of Aaron's two sons, Nadav and Avihu, who "offered a strange fire, that had not been commanded." The sages offered several readings of this episode, all based on close reading of the several places in the Torah where their death is referred to. Some said they had been drinking alcohol. (Vayikra Rabbah 12:1; Ramban to Lev. 10:9) Others said that they were arrogant, holding themselves up above the community. This was the reason they had never married. (Vayikra Rabbah 20:10)

Some say that they were guilty of giving a halakhic ruling about the use of man-made fire, instead of asking their teacher Moses whether it was permitted. (Eruvin 63a) Others say they were restless in the presence of Moses and Aaron. They said, when will these two old men die and we can lead the congregation? (Sanhedrin 52a)

However we read the episode, it seems clear that they were all too eager to exercise leadership.

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL
AND THE WEB AT WWW.AISHDAS.ORG/TA.
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Carried away by their enthusiasm to play a part in the inauguration, they did something they had not been commanded to do. After all, had Moses not done something entirely on his own initiative, namely breaking the tablets when he came down the mountain and saw the golden calf? If he could act spontaneously, why not they?

They forgot the difference between a priest and a prophet. A prophet lives and acts in time -- in this moment that is unlike any other. A priest acts and lives in eternity, by following a set of rules that never change. Everything about "the holy," the realm of the priest, is precisely scripted in advance. The holy is the place where G-d, not man, decides.

Nadav and Avihu failed fully to understand that there are different kinds of leadership and they are not interchangeable. What is appropriate to one may be radically inappropriate to another. A judge is not a politician. A king is not a prime minister. A religious leader is not a celebrity seeking popularity. Confuse these roles and not only will you fail. You will also damage the very office you were chosen to hold.

The real contrast here, though, is the difference between Aaron and his two sons. They were, it seems, opposites. Aaron was over-cautious and had to be persuaded by Moses even to begin. Nadav and Avihu were not cautious enough. So keen were they to put their own stamp on the role of priesthood that their impetuosity was their downfall.

These are, perennially, the two challenges leaders must overcome. The first is the reluctance to lead. Why me? Why should I get involved? Why should I undertake the responsibility and all that comes with it - the stress, the hard work, and the criticisms leaders always have to face? Besides which, there are other people better qualified and more suited than I am.

Even the greatest were reluctant to lead. Moses at the burning bush found reason after reason to show that he was not the man for the job. Isaiah and Jeremiah both felt inadequate. Summoned to lead, Jonah ran away. The challenge really is daunting. But when you feel as if you are being called to a task, if you know that the mission is necessary and important, then there is nothing you can do but say, Hineni, "Here I am." In the words of a famous book title, you have to "feel the fear and do it anyway." (Susan Jeffers, *Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway*, Ballantine Books, 2006.)

The other challenge is the opposite. There are some people who simply see themselves as leaders. They are convinced that they can do it better. We recall the famous remark of Israel's first president, Chaim Weizmann, that he was head of a nation of a million presidents.

From a distance it seems so easy. Isn't it obvious that the leader should do X, not Y? Homo sapiens contains many back seat drivers who know better than those whose hands are on the steering wheel. Put them in a position of leadership and they can do great damage. Never having sat in the driver's seat, they have no idea of how many considerations have to be taken into account, how many voices of opposition have to be overcome, how difficult it is at one and the same time to cope with the pressures of events while not losing sight of long term ideals and objectives. The late John F Kennedy said that the worst shock on being elected president was that "when we got to the White House we discovered that things were as bad as we said they were." Nothing prepares you for the pressures of leadership when the stakes are high.

Overenthusiastic, overconfident leaders can do great harm. Before they became leaders they understood events through their own perspective. What they did not understand is that leadership involves relating to many perspectives, many interest groups and points of view. That does not mean that you try to satisfy everyone. Those who do so end up satisfying no one. But you have to consult and persuade. Sometimes you need to honour precedent and the traditions of a particular institution. You have to know exactly when to behave as your predecessors did, and when not to. These call for considered judgement, not wild enthusiasm in the heat of the moment.

Nadav and Avihu were surely great people. The trouble was that they believed they were great people. They were not like their father Aaron who had to be persuaded to come close to the altar because of his sense of inadequacy. The one thing Nadav and Avihu lacked was a sense of their own inadequacy. (The composer Berlioz once said of a young musician: "He knows everything. The one thing he lacks is inexperience.")

To do anything great we have to be aware of these two temptations. One is the fear of greatness: who am I? The other is being convinced of your greatness: who are they? I can do it better. We can do great things if (a) the task matters more than the person, (b) we are willing to do our best without thinking ourselves superior to others, and (c) we are willing to take advice, the thing Nadav and Avihu failed to do.

People do not become leaders because they are great. They become great because they are willing to serve as leaders. It does not matter that we think ourselves inadequate. So did Moses. So did Aaron. What matters is the willingness, when challenge calls, to say, Hineni, "Here I am." ©2014 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**S**peak to the children of Israel saying, 'these are the creatures which you may eat from all of the animals upon the earth: any animal that has split hoofs with clefts through the hoofs and that chews its cud-such you may eat'" (Lev. 11:2-3)

The two main subjects dealt with in this week's Torah portion of Shemini seem to be totally removed one from the other. First, we read of the tragic death of the two sons of Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, on the eighth day of the consecration of the Sanctuary and then we read all of the details of the laws of kashrut including detailed lists of animals, fowl and fish which are forbidden. It seems to me, however, that there is a powerful connection between these two issues as well as a crucial message-especially for our post-modern age.

Let us begin with kashrut. The Bible itself concludes its food prohibitions by declaring the following rationale: "Because I am the Lord your G-d and you shall sanctify yourselves and you shall be holy because I am holy." (Lev. 11:44) Most of our commentaries define holiness as the ability to separate oneself from one's physical instincts and drives, an inner discipline which enables the individual to rise above the physical and to come closer to the spiritual.

However, the roots of kashrut express an even deeper idea and ideal. The introduction to the Five Books of Moses is the story of the Garden of Eden and the first sin of Adam and Eve. This transgression of the first two human beings was a breach of the laws of kashrut. The Almighty commanded Adam, "From every tree of the garden you are free to eat, but as for the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you must not eat of it." (Gen. 2:16-17) Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit and were banished from the Garden of Eden. But why was that fruit forbidden? After all, the Bible itself testifies that the fruit was "good for food" which probably meant low in calories and devoid of cholesterol, "a delight to the eyes" which suggests a beautiful color and an appealing texture, and "desirable as a source for wisdom". (Gen. 3:6) which testifies that it activated the brain cells. So if the fruit was so desirable, why was it prohibited?

Strangely enough, it is the serpent who explains the reason: "Because G-d knows that on the day that you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like G-d, knowing what is good and what is evil". (Gen. 3:5) The serpent, symbolizing the forces of evil within the world, is expressing the fundamental struggle which takes place within the heart of every individual: who decides what is good and what is evil? What is right and what is wrong? Is it the subjective individual or is it a more objective outside system or Being whom we

call G-d?

What G-d is setting down at the very dawn of creation is the fundamental axiom of a religious lifestyle: the final arbiter in the realm of good and evil must be the Divine Will rather than individual desire. The forbidden fruit is evil because G-d calls it evil. The ultimate source of morality must be a system which is higher than any individual.

Many years ago, I was told by a congregant - whose husband had been considered a pillar of their community and whose children were all studying in day schools - that her husband had established a second residence with another woman several miles away with whom he had even fathered a child. When I confronted the husband, he didn't even blink an eyelash. He confirmed the facts of the case, but insisted that he was acting out of the highest standards of morality. The only way he could continue his marriage to his wife - who he insisted could not live if she was a divorcee - was if he was simultaneously receiving satisfaction from this other woman, and that he had rescued this "second wife" from committing suicide. Not only did he not consider his act of adultery a transgression; he truly believed that he had rescued two women's lives by having this extra-marital relationship.

Sigmund Freud, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, maintains that when it comes to rationalization and self-justification, every human being is a genius. We can always find cogent reasons justifying to ourselves acts that we would readily condemn in others. It is for this reason, that the subjective individual can never be the ultimate arbiter as to what is proper and what is improper. Our Bible gives the Divine imprimatur to what is right and what is wrong. Although many of the laws of Kashrut are guided by ethical sensitivity and the basic moral ambiguity involved in eating the flesh of creatures that were once alive, these laws are basically the paradigm for our deference to G-d in the realm of morality. Hence, despite the fact that post-modernism questions any absolute position, our Ten Commandments are not merely options.

Religious commitment demands humility of the individual who is required to bend his knee before a higher Divine power, both in terms of our ethical and ritual lives as well as in terms of our acceptance of tragedy which often seems absurd and illogical. Aaron the High Priest stood at the zenith of success with the consecration of the Sanctuary in the desert. Then, his two sons performed an unsolicited religious act which expressed their profound appreciation of the Divine "And fire came forth from the Lord and consumed them" - inexplicably and even absurdly (Lev. 10:2 and Rashi ad loc.). The Bible records Aaron's response in two Hebrew words: "And Aaron was silent". (ibid, 10:3) Apparently, we learn from this that when one individual acts unjustly towards another, we must speak out and act. But when a tragedy occurs which is not of human

making - and when a Divine law insists upon human discipline - we must submit to the ultimate will of a G-d whom our Bible guarantees is "A G-d of compassion and loving kindness" even though it may be beyond our subjective understanding. ©2014 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

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The Torah itself records the reaction of Moshe to the tragic deaths of the sons of Aharon. Moshe tells his grieving brother that the Lord had informed him, "that I will sanctify My name through those who are nearest to Me." Therefore even though the harsh judgment against Aharon – the dramatic and unexpected deaths of his two elder sons, Nadav and Avihu – dominates the mood of the moment, there is a subtle message of consolation and explanation that Moshe offers to his brother.

And that perhaps is one of the reasons that Aharon remained silent in acceptance of the fate that befell him and his family. Aharon apparently realized that there was a higher purpose also involved in these events – the sanctification of G-d's name and a warning against tampering with the ritual services of the Tabernacle/Temple/Mishkan – and this realization motivated his silence.

It is very difficult for us ordinary mortals to appreciate the nature of this means of sanctification. We tremble at having to think of G-d's sanctification and the ennobling of G-d's name in the world when we are forced always to think of death and human tragedy. We much prefer to think of G-d's greatness in terms of charity, compassion, comfort and consolation.

Yet, as mortals who possess an eternal soul, we all realize that death and tragedy are all part of life – unavoidable parts of life that we all experience and must deal with. Thus Moshe's words to his brother regarding death and tragedy are really addressed to all of us as well. That is the reason they appear in the Torah, whose words are directed to all humans for all time.

Those who are closest to G-d in their physical lifetime are treated specially and uniquely by Heaven for good or for better. This is a partial insight into the overall pattern of challenge and difficulty that is the leitmotif of Jewish history. The Jewish people are special and being special carries with it great burdens and responsibilities. Even small errors of judgment or weakness and deviation of behavior can carry with it grave and lasting consequences.

As such, all Jews should feel that every action and pattern of behavior that becomes part of their lives is scrutinized, judged and brings forth reaction from G-d and humans. Nothing that happens in G-d's world is ignored or even forgotten. We are held to high standards. We are tight-rope walkers and there is no

real safety net stretched out beneath us.

We all realize that a hurt inflicted upon us by a family member or close friend pains us much more deeply than from a similar hurt suffered by us from a stranger or even an enemy. Those who are closest to us are the ones that can hurt us the most. And that also is part of the message that Moshe told his brother. Since we are so close to G-d, Heaven is more pained, so to speak, by our shortcomings, insults and deviations from His path of instruction for us.

So our relationship to G-d is one of particular favor but also one of great challenge and responsibility. Simply by realizing this do we enhance our own holiness and help sanctify G-d's name. ©2014 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. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The Torah in this week's Parsha mandates that for animals to be kosher they must possess two characteristics-cloven hooves and chew the cud. (Leviticus 11:3) In contemporary times there is much ado about the impact of food on physical health. My doctors keep telling me for example, to keep the fat and cholesterol down. Is it possible that food could similarly impact on one's spiritual well-being? This in fact is the position of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in his explanation of kashrut (the dietary laws).

The characteristics of kosher animals point to their being more passive in nature. In Hirsch's words: "If we look at the signs for clean animals they appear plant-like. As they chew the cud, the food consumed passes through two stomachs, is driven up the gullet again and chewed for the second time. Thus, these animals spend a great deal of time in the absorption of food. The cloven hooves of the permitted animals also seem to have been created more for the mere purpose of standing than for being used as weapons or tools."

The same is true concerning fish. To be kosher, fish must have fins and scales. (Leviticus 11:9) Not coincidentally, fish that have these characteristics are by and large more peaceful in nature. The more aggressive fish fall into the category of the prohibited. Moreover, birds of prey are by and large enjoined. The rule holds fast. The more aggressive animals and fowl are prohibited. The more passive are permitted.

Of course, not everyone who consumes kosher food leads lives of inner peace. There are troubled people who eat kosher, just as there are fine people who do not eat kosher. Nonetheless, the ritual of kashrut may help us become more conscious of our responsibilities to live ethical lives.

The balance between outer action and inner feelings is especially discernible in the laws of forbidden

and permitted animals. Note, that chewing the cud is an internal characteristic as it deals with the inner digestive system. In contrast, cloven hooves are an external characteristic. One merely has to look at an animal's foot to detect whether this criteria has been met. Perhaps, just perhaps this teaches that to be kosher one's behavior must not only be correct, but inwardly pure.

Whether these rationales are satisfactory or not, the prohibited foods teach us discipline. They remind us that in the end, G-d is the arbiter of right and wrong. Notwithstanding, the kashrut laws carry powerful ethical lessons-lessons that can help ennoble and sanctify our lives. ©2011 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 YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week's parsha, Shmini, teaches the dietary laws of which animals can and can't be eaten. "These are the animals that can be eaten from amongst all of the animals of the land. All those that have split-hooves and chew their cud... [11:2-3]"

These kashrus laws apply and affect us on both a physical and spiritual level. Whenever someone takes issue, claiming there's no evidence that these foods cause any physical harm, I invariably counter that I am, in fact, much older than I look. I was actually born B.C. before cholesterol... In those years, people had never heard of cholesterol. It wasn't found on a single supermarket label. It wasn't recognized as the number one cause of heart attacks. So much for what science knows as of today. We all know that twenty-five years from now we'll be looking back on the antiquated ideas, understandings and methods of the year 2003.

The same way that the physical composition of the food affects us in a physical sense, the spiritual make-up of the food affects us in a spiritual sense. Though we have some knowledge of the physical, how different things would impact upon us spiritually is clearly out of our league. Our only hope is to follow the directives of the Master Healer outlined in His Torah.

An interesting comparison is drawn between different nations and the animals that represent them. Yisroel is compared to a sheep, Esav {the modern western world} is compared to a pig and Yishmael {the Middle Eastern world} is compared to a camel.

(An interesting side point is that these animals are the staple foods of their respective nations. The Jews eat lamb but not pig or camel. The western world eats pig as one of its staples. The Moslem, Arab world doesn't eat pig but eat camel.)

Sheep have both of the necessary attributes in order to be kosher they chew their cud and have split-hooves. Pigs have split-hooves but don't chew their cud, while camels chew their cud but don't have split-hooves.

The hooves have to do with travel. That idea of always moving forward is exemplified by the western world. A father is termed "the old man." Technology renders yesterday's wonders obsolete. With the theory of evolution, there's not much of a basis to respect the earlier generations who are simply a few steps closer to having been apes. The movement is forward, forward, forward with hardly a look behind. Having split-hooves but not chewing the cud.

Chewing the cud is a regurgitation of the past. The Middle Eastern world looks back on the success and glory of their history. Developments in mathematics and science are no longer their domain. Even their present is backward, a regurgitation of the past, indicating a fairly bleak future. Chewing the cud but not having split-hooves.

The sheep and other kosher animals both chew their cud and have split-hooves. Yisroel is manifested by a deep respect and reverence for the past those that are generations closer to Adam HaRishon {the first man} and to those that stood at Sinai and a confident faith and hope in the future and glory that it holds.

"Do not become defiled with these because I am Hashem, your G-d, sanctify yourselves because I am holy... [11:43-44]"

It is this commitment to the laws of kashrus that will help bring about that glorious future. ©2014 Rabbi Y. Ciner & torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"And they (Nadav and Avihu) brought a foreign fire before G-d" (Vayikra 10:1). "And a fire went out from before G-d and consumed them, and they died before G-d (10:2). Most (e.g. Toras Kohanim 3:1:22, see Rabbeinu Bachye) are of the opinion that Nadav and Avihu brought this "strange fire" into the inner sanctum (the Kodesh HaKadashim, where the Ark was). Raavad suggests that the basis for saying that they went into the inner sanctum (as opposed to bringing the incense on the golden altar in the outer sanctum, where incense is usually brought) is that they went "before G-d," a term also used to describe the place G-d's fire came from, i.e. the inner sanctum (see Toras Kohanim 3:1:34). Since both are described as "before G-d," they must both be the same place. Raavad then asks how the fire could be described as "going out," meaning going out from the inner sanctum, if Nadav and Avihu were inside. To answer this, he suggests that they weren't consumed by the fire until after they had left the inner sanctum (perhaps to avoid having to remove their bodies from the inner sanctum). Rav Yitzchok Sorotzkin, sh'lita, (Rinas Yitzchok I) asks how Raavad could say that they weren't consumed until after they left the inner sanctum if they also died "before G-d," which Raavad says refers to the inner sanctum. (Rav Sorotzkin leaves this question unanswered.)

Before discussing any of the ancillary issues related to this question, a discussion regarding what the term “before G-d” refers to is warranted. G-d had commanded that a jar of manna (the daily bread that fell from heaven in the desert) be stored “before G-d” (Sh’mos 16:32-33), and it was put “before the testimony,” i.e. the Ark in the inner sanctum (16:34, see Rashi). Similarly, the staff collected from all the Tribal Chiefs after Korach’s rebellion was put “before G-d” (Bamidbar 17:22), which was “before the testimony” in the inner sanctum (see 17:19 and 17:24). However, the overwhelming majority of the time a place is described as “before G-d” it cannot mean “in the inner sanctum.” Numerous times it is used in conjunction with one of the vessels in the outer sanctum (the “Kodesh,” or “Ohel Mo’ed”), such as where the Menorah (Sh’mos 27:21 and 40:25, Vayikra 24:3-4), Shulchan (Sh’mos 40:23 and Vayikra 24:6/8) and Mizbayach HaK’tores (Sh’mos 30:8, Vayikra 4:7, 4:18 and 16:18) were. It is also used to describe the place where Aharon wears his Priestly garments (Sh’mos 28:12, 28:29-30, 28:35 and 28:38), garments he cannot wear in the inner sanctum. The context of most instances of the words “before G-d” indicates that it is referring to the courtyard area, which corresponds to the “Azara” in the Temple (see Rashi on Vayikra 1:5), including several instances (e.g. Sh’mos 29:11 and 29:42, Vayikra 1:3, 4:4, 14:11, 14:23, 15:14 and 16:7) where it explicitly says that it is by the “door of the Tent of Meeting,” i.e. in the courtyard. There are even some instances (e.g. D’varim 14:23/26) where “before G-d” refers to an area beyond the confines of the Temple (but inside the city), thereby preventing the term from being limited to the Temple grounds (D’varim 27:7 uses it to refer to the altar built on Mt. Eival). It would therefore be difficult to say that by using the term “before G-d” the Torah must be telling us that Nadav and Avihu sinned inside the inner sanctum, or that they died there. Nor could it automatically be assumed that all three things (where Nadav and Avihu sinned, where the fire came from, and where they died) occurred in the same place just because the same term (“before G-d”) is used for all of them.

Most assume that Nadav and Avihu brought their “foreign fire” into the inner sanctum based on their deaths being mentioned as an introduction to the procedure necessary before Aharon is allowed to go in (see Rashi on Vayikra 16:2). If that was where they were when they sinned, it would be difficult to say that the fire that consumed them originated outside the inner sanctum and then “went out” by going “in.” (Nor could it be considered “going out” if both the fire and its targets were in the same area outside the inner sanctum.) Since G-d’s presence is most highly concentrated (as it were) within the inner sanctum, this is the divine fire’s most likely point of origin. Raavad, on the other hand, attributes the assumption that Nadav and Avihu sinned in the same place that the fire “went out” from to the same term being used for both. However, it is

inconceivable that Raavad didn’t know that the term “before G-d” is used to describe other parts of the Temple complex, and, as Rav Sorotzkin pointed out, by suggesting that Nadav and Avihu were consumed after they left the inner sanctum despite that spot also being referred to as “before G-d,” Raavad must also agree that being used multiple times in the same narrative (and in the same verse) does not mean that it has to refer to the same exact location. Perhaps Raavad suggested that using the same term meant it was the same location because of the way they were used, not because it was the same term. Did the fire come “from Before G-d” (with a capital “B” because it is a proper name for a specific location) or “from before G-d” (with a lower case “b” because it is a description of an area near the divine presence)? Being that the words “before G-d” can refer to a number of different locations, it must be a lower case “b.” Or at least it usually is. When coupled with the word “from” (by having the letter “mem” as a prefix), though, the implication is that something is moving “from” a known, identified, area, in this case “from” the area previously identified as “before G-d.” Therefore, even though the term “before G-d” later in the same verse (see also Bamidbar 3:4) can mean outside the inner sanctum, the term “from before G-d” implies from the area that was previously identified as “before G-d.” And since the area the divine fire originated from was the inner sanctum, the previously mentioned “before G-d” must have been referring to the inner sanctum as well.

This suggestion was made to try to explain Raavad’s approach, which was meant to answer the question he posed regarding the fire being described as “going out” despite its intended targets, Nadav and Avihu, being “in” the same location as the fire. However, there is another way to address this issue without forcing Nadav and Avihu to leave the inner sanctum before they are consumed.

The expression “and a fire went out from before G-d” appears twice in our narrative, once to describe the fire that consumed the offerings that were on the altar (Vayikra 9:24) and once to describe the fire that consumed Nadav and Avihu (10:2). When Toras Kohanim tells us that Nadav and Avihu went into the inner sanctum, it explains what their motivation was: “Since the sons of Aharon saw that all the offerings had been brought, and all the deeds (that had been commanded) had been done, and [yet] the divine presence did not descend for Israel, Nadav said to Avihu, ‘does anyone cook a dish without fire?’ Immediately they took a foreign fire and entered into the inner sanctum.” They weren’t reacting to the already-sent divine fire, but trying to bring it about. Why, then, is the fire that consumed the offerings described before the fire that Nadav and Avihu brought into the inner sanctum?

It would seem that the two identical verses of “and a fire went out from before G-d” are not describing

two different fires that “went out” at two different times. Rather, as Rashbam suggests (although not to answer the issues being discussed here), there was but one “fire that went out from before G-d.” It originated in the inner sanctum and consumed Nadav and Avihu on its way out to consume the offerings that were on the altar. [It should be noted that Rashbam is one of the few commentators with the opinion that Nadav and Avihu were not in the inner sanctum; he says the fire consumed them while they were in the outer sanctum as it traveled from the inner sanctum to the courtyard. I am applying this to the opinion that they were in the inner sanctum, with the fire originating between the “K’ruvim” and consuming them while they were in the inner sanctum between the Ark and the Curtain on its way out.] Since it was the very same fire that consumed Nadav and Avihu and (then) the offerings, first the Torah finishes the narrative it had begun regarding the offerings (which ended with the divine fire coming out of the sanctuary and consuming them) before starting on the concurrent narrative of the very same fire consuming Nadav and Avihu. And since the fire did “go out” of the inner sanctum (and the outer sanctum for that matter) in order to consume the offerings, there is no issue with it being described as “going out” when it’s repeated in the Nadav and Avihu narrative, even though Nadav and Avihu never left the inner sanctum. ©2014 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's Haftorah, read in conjunction with Parshas Parah, describes the Jewish people's state of purity in the time of Mashiach. Hashem reminds them of their sinful behavior that kindled His wrath and sent them into exile. After endless years of darkness Hashem will purify His children and return them home. The prophet Yechezkel says in Hashem's name, "And I will sprinkle pure waters upon you that will purify you from all your impurities and repulsive actions..." (36:25) Yechezkel is referring to the Jewish people's ultimate state of purity wherein Hashem will totally cleanse them from sin. Yechezkel compares this spiritual cleansing to purification from ritual impurity. It is worthwhile to understand this particular analogy. Instead of comparing this purification to the traditional immersion process Yechezkel compares it to the sprinkling of the red heifer waters. This detailed and mysterious procedure purified one from direct contact with a corpse. Such contact produced the most severe state of ritual impurity and required a unique purification process. Yechezkel's analogy suggests a direct corollary between sin and death. Apparently, the ultimate removal of sin is similar to the removal of the impurity of death.

Let us examine the nature of the red heifer process and understand its relationship to sin. We read

in the maftir portion of Parshas Parah that the kohain was commanded to slaughter the heifer and sprinkle its sacrificial blood outside the Bais Hamikdash's walls. The kohanim then burned the heifer's body and mixed her ashes with spring water producing a ritual mixture. The mixture was then sprinkled on anyone who was associated with a corpse. The Sages comment on the unique nature of this sacrifice and explain that it atoned for the Jewish nation's sin of the golden calf. They show how every detail of this sacrifice ran parallel lines with the details of the sinful golden calf experience. (see Rashi to Bamidbar 19:2 II)

This indicates a direct relationship between the spiritual impurity of death and the golden calf. For this reason the purification process began with atonement from the golden calf sin. In fact, the purifying mixture was a product of the atonement of that sin. Whenever the Jewish nation required purification ashes they would atone for the golden calf sin and produced their necessary mixtures. Apparently, this sin's impact was so far reaching that it left an indelible impression on the Jewish people's ritual purity. Yet, this atonement was specifically related to association with a corpse and only required when producing purifying ashes.

We can appreciate this intriguing phenomenon through the Sages' profound insight in Mesichta Avoda Zara (5a). They teach us that when the Jewish people received the Torah they transcended the curse of mortality. They cleaved to Hashem's will with such intensity that their bodies were transformed into semi-spiritual entities. After two thousand years of world existence the body finally cooperated with the soul and created a harmonious unit of Hashem's perfect service. Regrettably, this lofty experience was short lived and, after forty days of elevation the Jewish people succumbed to fear and anxiety. They doubted if their revered leader Moshe Rabbeinu would ever return and desperately sought a qualified spiritual replacement. This set the stage for their insincere Egyptian converts who seduced the Jewish people into idolatry. This infamous plunge returned them to mortality. Their bodies returned to their physical state replete with all earthly urges and cravings.

We can further develop this through Sefer Hachinuch's understanding of the red heifer and its ritual mixture. He explains death's ritual impurity in the following manner. When one passes away, his soul departs from his body leaving behind a total physical entity. The body, barren of any trace of spirituality, projects a penetrating image of vanity and reflects a lifetime of earthly urges and sinful practices. Direct contact with a barren body damages one's spirituality and renders him ritually impure. This impure status has a positive effect and forces one to view his body and its effects in a different manner. His impure predicament reminds him that his body was meant to unite with his soul and he helps one senses the repulse of total earthly cravings. (Sefer Hachinuch Mitzva 263)

In truth, this vanity and sinful association traces back to the Jewish people's shameful sin of the golden calf. That single act returned the Jewish body to its physical state and created its ritual impurity. During that infamous scene the Jewish people traded their closest relationship with Hashem for shameful bodily cravings. Although this became reality their brief Har Sinai experience proved that one can free himself from earthly drives and direct his total being towards Hashem.

We now understand the red heifer's crucial role in the purification process. We realize that atonement from the golden calf was a prerequisite for ritual purity. Hashem introduced this impurity to assist one in detaching himself from his physical drives. One's impure state sent him a clear message about the body's shameful role in sin. However, one was reminded that his physical cravings were not necessarily part of his Jewish psyche. There was a time in the Jewish people's history where body and soul craved for something of true content and substance namely, association with Hashem. The first step of purification was to contemplate the damaging effect of physical drives. After detaching oneself from his deep rooted urges the red heifer mixture completed the process. Its goal was to remind one of his true potential, to unify body and soul thereby achieving spiritual perfection.

We can now begin to understand Yechezkel's comparison between ultimate purity from sin and the red heifer mixture. The prophet Yechezkel describes this ultimate purity in the following words, "And I shall give you a new heart and place a new spirit in your midst and remove the stone heart from your flesh..." (36:26) Ramban teaches us that this refers to the Jewish people's pure desire to fulfill Hashem's will. The time will ultimately arrive for the body and all its drives to take a back seat. The Jewish people in the Messianic era will return to Adam's perfect state before his involvement in sin. Their single minded desire will be similar to that of the Jewish people during their first forty days at Har Sinai. They will totally detach themselves from physical passions and crave for the closest relationship with Hashem. (Ramban D'vorim 30:6) This process will ultimately return them to their semi-spiritual state of Har Sinai. This time, however, it will be everlasting and Hashem will permanently remove the curse of mortality from His people. (see Daas T'vunos 3:40)

The analogy of the purifying waters is now complete. Throughout the years, the red heifer's sacrificial waters purified one from association with earthly cravings. The ritual mix removed ritual impurity and reduced one's sinful urges. In addition, the atonement process brought one in contact with his soul's innermost cravings, to cleave to Hashem. It linked one to his glorious past at Har Sinai and inspired him to his glorious future in Meshiach's times. And it will ultimately complete its role and detach the Jewish

people from all physical drives and passions and direct body and soul's total focus towards Hashem.

How timely is this lesson immediately following Purim with our sights set on Pesach. The mitzvos of Purim allows us to contact our innermost feelings and ascertain our true essence. After this uplifting experience we begin preparing for our total redemption. Indeed, the Sages teach us that as the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt in the month of Nissan they will be ultimately redeemed in that same month. May we merit that this refer to our upcoming Nissan. ©2014 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

The Gemara (Tractate) in Pesachim (3a) quotes: "A person should not speak in a negative way, as we see the Torah itself" went out of its way to speak nicely regarding the animals entering the Ark, describing the non-kosher animals as specifically that -- non-kosher. It doesn't call them Tamei (Impure). The Torah "wastes" words in order to teach us the importance of speaking nicely. From this week's Parsha, Shemini, we have a problem with this Gemara. The Torah continually refers to non-kosher animals as Tamei (11:4 and others). What happened to speaking nicely?

R' Mordechai Kamenetzky answers that the difference is that the story of the Ark is a narrative, which is when people should be careful to tell it over in a nice way, refraining from Lashon Hara (slander) or negativity of any sort. In our Parsha, however, the Torah describes the nitty-gritty laws of what one may eat. In our case, it's important to give a resounding "TAMEI!" when discussing these matters, as the consequences are much graver. It should be the same when dealing with children and others around us who may not know better. We speak softly in order to get them to understand history, reasons and customs of Judaism. However, as the metaphor of food may hint at, if they are in imminent danger of internalizing negative influences, it's time to fearlessly admonish them. When dealing with clear right and wrong, the Torah tells us that sometimes it's necessary to boldly speak where no one has spoken before. ©2014 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

