

## PARSHAH SUMMARY &amp; COMMENTARY

## Shemini/Hachodesh

*Leviticus 9:1-11:47; Exodus 12:1-20*  
*Torah Reading for Week of 23-29 March, 2003*

"And it came to pass on the eighth day..."

Last week's Parshah, Tzav, told of the "seven days of inauguration" during which the Sanctuary was consecrated and Aaron and his sons were trained for the priesthood. This week's reading, Shemini ("eighth"), begins by recounting the events of the eighth day--which was the 1st of Nissan of the year 2449 from Creation (1312 bce), two weeks before the first anniversary of the Exodus.

And it came to pass on the eighth day, that Moses called Aaron and his sons, and the elders of Israel.

And he said to Aaron: "Take you a young calf for a sin offering, and a ram for an ascent offering, without blemish, and offer them before G-d.

"And to the children of Israel you shall speak, saying: Take a kid of the goats for a sin offering; and a calf and a lamb, both of the first year, without blemish, for a burnt offering; also a bullock and a ram for peace offerings, to sacrifice before G-d; and a meal offering

mingled with oil;

"For today G-d will appear to you..."

The offerings are brought as instructed, following which,

Moses and Aaron went into the Tent of Meeting, and came out, and blessed the people: and the glory of G-d appeared to all the people.

And there came a fire out from before G-d, and consumed the ascent offering and the fat [of the other offerings] upon the Altar. And all the people saw, and sang out, and fell on their faces.

**Strange Fire**

And then, in the midst of the jubilation, tragedy struck.

Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aaron, took each of them his censer, and put fire in it, and put incense on it, and offered strange fire before G-d, which He commanded them not.

A fire went out from G-d, and consumed them, and they died before G-d.

And Moses said to Aaron: "This is it that which G-d spoke, saying: I will be sanctified in those who are close to Me, and before all the people I will be glorified." And Aaron was silent.

And Moses called Mishael and Elzafan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them: "Come near, carry your brothers from

**Commentary**

AND IT CAME TO PASS ON THE EIGHTH DAY (LEVITICUS 9:1)

That day took ten crowns: It was the first day of the Creation (i.e., a Sunday), the first for the offerings of the nessi'im (tribal heads), the first for the priesthood, the first for [public] sacrifice, the first for the fall of fire from Heaven, the first for the eating of sacred food, the first for the dwelling of the Divine Presence in Israel, the first for the priestly blessing of Israel, the first day on which it was forbidden to sacrifice to G-d anywhere save in the Sanctuary, and the first of months.

*(Talmud, Shabbat 87b)*

That day was as joyous to G-d as the day on which heaven and earth were created.

*(Talmud, Megillah 10b)*

AND IT CAME TO PASS ON THE EIGHTH DAY (9:1)

The number seven represents the cycle of creation; the number eight represents the "circumference"—that which lies beyond the perimeter of time and space. This is why the Divine Presence came to dwell in the Israelite camp on the eighth day. This is also alluded to in the saying of our sages (Talmud, Erchin 13b) that "The lyre of Moshiach has eight strings."

*(Keli Yakar; Shaloh)*

AND IT CAME TO PASS ON THE EIGHTH DAY... AND HE SAID TO AARON (9:1)

For seven days, G-d persuaded Moses at the burning bush to go on His mission to Egypt, as Moses refused... Said G-d to Moses: "By your life, I shall tie this in your skirts." When did He repay him? ... All the seven days of inauguration

Moses ministered in the office of High Priest, and he imagined it was his. On the seventh day G-d said to him: "It belongs not to you but to your brother Aaron..."

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

AND MOSES SAID: "THIS IS THE THING WHICH G-D COMMANDED YOU TO DO; AND THE GLORY OF G-D SHALL APPEAR TO YOU" (9:6)

For the seven days of inauguration, during which Moses set up the Sanctuary, performed the service in it, and dismantled it each day, the Divine Presence did not rest in it. The people of Israel were humiliated, and said to Moses: "Moses our teacher! All the toil that we toiled was only that the Divine Presence should dwell amongst us and we should know the sin of the Calf was forgiven us!" Said Moses to them: "Aaron my brother is more worthy than I—through his offerings and his service the Divine Presence will rest upon you, and you will know that G-d has chosen you."

*(Rashi)*

AND NADAV AND AVIHU, THE SONS OF AARON, TOOK EACH OF THEM HIS CENSER... AND THEY DIED BEFORE G-D (10:1-2)

Bar Kappara said in the name of Rabbi Jeremiah ben Elazar: Aaron's sons died on account of four things: for drawing near, for offering, for the strange fire, and for not having taken counsel from each other. "For drawing near"—because they entered into the innermost precincts of the Sanctuary. "For offering"—because they offered a sacrifice which they had not been commanded to offer. "For the strange fire"—they brought in fire from the kitchen. "And for not having taken counsel from each other"—as it says, "Each of them his censer," implying that they acted each on his own initiative, not taking counsel from one another.

Rabbi Mani of She'ab, Rabbi Joshua of Sikkim, and Rabbi Yochanan in the name of Rabbi Levi said: The sons of Aaron died on account of four things... Because they had drunk wine, as it says [immediately following the incident], "Drink no wine nor strong drink... that you die not" (Leviticus 10:9). Because they served

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before the Sanctuary out of the camp." So they went near, and carried them in their robes out of the camp; as Moses had said.

Because of the centrality of their role in the revelation of the Divine Presence in the Sanctuary that day, Aaron and his two remaining sons are forbidden to engage in any of the customary mourning practices:

And Moses said to Aaron, and to Elazar and to Itamar, his sons:

"Let not the hair of your heads grow long, neither rend your clothes; lest you die, and lest anger come upon all the people. Your brethren, the whole house of Israel, shall bewail the conflagration which G-d has burned..."

And they did according to the word of Moses.

**G-d Speaks to Aaron**

And G-d spoke to Aaron, saying:

"Do not drink wine or strong drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you enter the Tent of Meeting, lest you die; it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations.

"And that you differentiate between holy and the profane, and between the impure and the pure. And that you instruct the children of Israel all the statutes which G-d has spoken to them by the hand of Moses."

**The Disagreement**

Moses instructs Aaron, Elazar and Itamar to eat the special offerings of the day, as prescribed (despite the fact that, ordinarily, a priest in mourning does not partake of the offerings). This they do, except in the case of one offering:

And Moses diligently sought the goat of the sin offering, and, behold, it was burnt; and he was angry with Elazar and Itamar, the sons of Aaron that were left alive, saying:

"Why have you not eaten the sin offering in the holy place, seeing it is most holy... you should indeed have eaten it in the holy place, as I commanded."

And Aaron replied to Moses: "Behold, this day have they offered their sin offering and their ascent offering before G-d; and such things have befallen me. If I had eaten the sin offering today, would it have been accepted in the sight of G-d?"

And Moses heard this, and it was favorable in his eyes.

**Commentary***(Talmud, Erubin 63a; Rashi)*

in the Sanctuary lacking the prescribed number of priestly garments (cf. Exodus 28:43). Because they entered the Sanctuary without washing their hands and feet (cf. Exodus 30:21). Because they had no children... as it says, "And Nadav and Avihu died... and they had no children" (Numbers 3:4).

Abba Hanin says it was because they had no wives, for it is written [regarding the High Priest], "And [he shall] make atonement for himself, and for his house" (Leviticus 16:6)—"his house" refers to his wife..

Rabbi Levi says that they were arrogant. Many women remained unmarried waiting for them. What did they say? Our father's brother is a king, our mother's brother is a prince [i.e., Nachshon, the head of the tribe of Judah], our father is a High Priest, and we are both Deputy High Priests; what woman is worthy of us? ... Moses and Aaron went first, Nadav and Avihu walked behind them, and all Israel followed, and Nadav and Avihu were saying: "When will these two old men die and we assume authority over the community?" Rabbi Judah in the name of Rabbi Aibu said that they uttered this to one another with their mouths, while Rabbi Pinchas said that they harbored the thought in their hearts.

Others say: They already deserved to die at Mount Sinai, when they callously feasted their eyes on the Divine (Exodus 24:9-11).

*(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)*

Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov stated: The sons of Aaron died only because they gave a legal decision in the presence of their master Moses. What was the exposition they made? They interpreted the verse (Leviticus 1:7), "And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire upon the altar." This is to teach us, they said, that although fire came down from heaven, it is nevertheless a mitzvah to bring also ordinary fire. (This is indeed the law; their sin was that they rendered a Halachic decision in the presence of their teacher.)

Nadav and Avihu died because of Aaron's making of the Golden Calf, as it is written: "And against Aaron did G-d verily rage to destroy him; and I prayed also for Aaron at that time" (Deuteronomy 9:20). "To destroy him" means the death of children, as it is written, "And I destroyed his fruit from above" (Amos 2:9). Moses' prayer was halfway effective, so that two died and two remained alive.

*(Rashi on Deuteronomy 9:20)*

"They came close to G-d and died" (Leviticus 16:1)—they approached the supernal light out of their great love of the Holy, and thereby died. Thus they died by "divine kiss" such as experienced by the perfectly righteous; it is only that the righteous die when the divine kiss approaches them, while they died by their approaching it... Although they sensed their own demise, this did not prevent them from drawing near to G-d in attachment, delight, delectability, fellowship, love, kiss and sweetness, to the point that their souls ceased from them.

*(Ohr HaChaim)***AND A FIRE WENT OUT FROM G-D AND CONSUMED THEM (10:2)**

But subsequently it says that Moses instructed Mishael and Eltzafan "Carry your brothers from before the Sanctuary" and that "They carried them out in their robes"? ... G-d sent forth two threads of fire into each one's nostrils and consumed their souls, without touching their flesh and without touching their clothes.

*(Midrash Tanchuma)*

**AND MOSES SAID TO AARON: "THIS IS IT THAT WHICH G-D SPOKE, SAYING: I WILL BE SANCTIFIED IN THOSE WHO ARE CLOSE TO ME..." (10:3)**

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## The Dietary Laws

"These are the animals which you may eat," G-d tells Moses to instruct the people of Israel, "among all the beasts that are upon the earth: Whatever parts the hoof and is cloven footed, and chews the cud."

To be fit to eat, an animal must have both identifying signs; the Torah cites four examples of animals that have but one, and are thus "unclean":

The camel... the hyrax... and the hare, because he chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you.

And the swine, though he divide the hoof and be cloven footed, yet he chews not the cud; he is unclean to you. Of their flesh shall you not eat, and their carcass shall you not touch; they are unclean to you.

## Commentary

This was said to Moses at Sinai, but its meaning was not known to him until the occurrence happened, when Moses said to Aaron: "My brother, at Sinai, G-d said to me: 'I will sanctify this House, and through a great man would I sanctify it,' and I thought that either through me or through you would this House be sanctified; but now I see that your two sons are greater than you or I."

*(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)*

## AND AARON WAS SILENT (10:3)

Because Aaron was silent, he was rewarded that G-d spoke exclusively to him (see below, verses 8-11; ordinarily G-d spoke to Aaron only in conjunction with—or through—Moses).

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

Said Rav Papa: The merit of attending a house of mourning lies in the silence observed.

*(Talmud, Berachot 6b)*

In youth, one learns to talk; in maturity, one learns to be silent. This is man's problem: that he learns to talk before he learns to be silent.

*(Rabbi Nachman of Breslav)*

Speech signifies comprehensibility. Melody is beyond language, expressing moods which words cannot describe. Silence is yet higher.

Water creatures may be eaten if they have both fins and scales (thereby excluding all forms of "seafood" other than the kosher species of fish).

Regarding birds, the Torah does not provide "signs," but instead lists twenty species of non-kosher fowl:

And these are they which you shall have in abomination among the birds; they shall not be eaten, they are abominable:

The eagle, and the bearded vulture and the black vulture. The kite, and the buzzard after its kind. Every raven after its kind. The owl, the kestrel, and the gull; and the sparrow hawk after its kind. The little owl, the fish fowl, and the great owl. The barn owl, the jackdaw, and the gier eagle. The stork, the heron after her kind; the hoopoe, and the bat.

Insects, as a rule, are forbidden—"All swarming things that fly, going upon four, shall be an abomination to you"—with four exceptions:

These of them you may eat: the locust after its kind, and the grasshopper after its kind, and the hargol after its kind, and the hagav after its kind.

## Ritual Purity

Carcasses of non-kosher mammals render the one who touches them or carries them tameh, ritually impure, as does the carcass of a kosher animal that was not slaughtered in the prescribed manner. The Torah also lists eight "creeping animals" which render a person tameh: "The rat, the mouse, and the tortoise after its kind;

The power to be silent at certain moments of life and of history is an important strength. It expresses the awareness that G-d is infinite, and cannot be encapsulated in our human conceptions of what should take place.

The Talmud tells of an instance in which Moses himself was told by G-d to be silent. G-d showed him in a vision all future generations of the Jewish people, and the leaders of each generation. Moses was greatly impressed by the wisdom of Rabbi Akiva. Then he saw the way the Romans tortured him to death. "Is this the reward of his Torah knowledge?" Moses asked. G-d answered: "Be silent. Thus it arose in My thought".

This is not to say that the Torah advocates a fatalistic approach to life. Before the event, one must do everything possible to prevent tragedy. But once it has happened, G-d forbid, through the acceptance and the silence we reach a special closeness to the Divine. Our Sages tell us that because Aaron was silent, he was rewarded by G-d speaking directly to him.

In our generation, too, there is a need for this power of silence. It is not a passive power, but one that leads to vigorous and joyous action. The Jewish response to the harrowing events of the Shoah is the determined and energetic action to rebuild Jewish family life and Jewish knowledge.

Through our power of silence we too, like Aaron, will merit Divine revelation. G-d will bring the Messiah, rebuilding the Temple and bringing lasting peace to the world.

*(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

## DO NOT DRINK WINE OR STRONG DRINK... WHEN YOU ENTER THE TENT OF MEETING (10:9)

Though the vine be supported by straight reeds and forked reeds, these cannot

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the gecko, the monitor, the lizard, the skink, and the chameleon."

Utensils, food and drink also become tameh through contact with a carcass. Food, however, can become tameh only if it has first been made "susceptible" by being wetted with a liquid.

A mikveh--a naturally occurring pool of water--or a wellspring do not become tameh; indeed, the mikveh and the wellspring have the power to purify things that have become impure that are immersed in them.

**Sanctity and Distinction**

You shall not make yourselves abominable [by eating] any creeping thing that creeps, neither shall you make yourselves unclean

with them, that you should be defiled by them.

For I am G-d your G-d; you shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and you shall be holy, for I am holy...

This is the law of the beasts, and of the birds, and of every living creature that moves in the waters, and of every creature that creeps on the earth.

To differentiate the pure and the impure, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten.

**Hachodesh**

This being the Shabbat before the 1st of Nissan, a special Torah reading (Exodus 12:1-20), called Hachodesh ("the month", literally, "the new [moon]"), is added to the regular Torah reading. This is the fourth of four supplementary readings added in the weeks preceding Purim and Passover (Shekalim, Zachor, Parah and Hachodesh).

Hachodesh contains G-d's communication to Moses on the 1st of Nissan, in Egypt, two weeks before the Exodus, in which He conveys to him the first mitzvah commanded to the people of Israel:

**Commentary**

stand up under the weight of the wine in the grapes. So if wine's own mother cannot bear its burden, how then can you?

(Midrash Rabbah)

**AND THAT YOU DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN HOLY AND THE PROFANE... AND THAT YOU INSTRUCT THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL (10:10-11)** This teaches us that one who has drunk wine is forbidden to render a ruling of Torah law.

(Rashi)

**AND MOSES DILIGENTLY SOUGHT THE GOAT OF THE SIN OFFERING, AND, BEHOLD, IT WAS BURNT... (10:16)**

Three goats were brought that day as sin-offerings: (1) the one that G-d commanded should be offered by Aaron on the occasion of the Eighth Day; (2) the one brought by Nachshon, leader of the tribe of Judah, as the first in the series of offerings brought by the tribal heads in honor of the Sanctuary's inauguration; (3) the goat offered every Rosh Chodesh (first of the month—that day was the first of Nissan)..

The first two were not burnt, but eaten by Aaron and his sons as per Moses' instructions. The Rosh Chodesh offering, however, Aaron burned, reasoning that if he was instructed to eat the meat of the day's special offerings even though he is in mourning (contrary to the usual law), he should not deduce that the same applies to an offering that is not unique to this special occasion, but is part of the regularly scheduled offerings.

This distinction escaped Moses, who demanded of Aaron and his sons: Why did you burn this sin-offering? And if you burned it because you are mourners, why did you eat the others? To which Aaron replied: "If you heard this instruction (that the offerings should be eaten even by mourners) regarding the offerings of the moment, you should not apply the same to the offerings for all times."

(Talmud, Zevachim; Rashi)

**AND [MOSES] WAS ANGRY (10:16)**

Because he became angry, he forgot the law that a mourner is forbidden to eat from the meat of the offerings.

(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)

**AND HE WAS ANGRY WITH ELAZAR AND ITAMAR (10:16)**

In deference to Aaron's honor he directed his anger to Elazar and Itamar.

(Rashi)

**AND AARON REPLIED TO MOSES (10:19)**

If Moses spoke angrily to Elazar and Itamar, why did Aaron reply? This tells us that Moses spoke to them only in deference to Aaron. Thus they said: it is not appropriate that our father sits silently and we reply, nor is it appropriate that a student should correct his teacher. Perhaps it was because Elazar know not how to answer? But the verse (Numbers 31:21) attests that, when he desired, he spoke in the presence of Moses and the tribal leaders.

(Rashi)

**AND MOSES HEARD THIS, AND IT WAS FAVORABLE IN HIS EYES (10:20)**

Moses was not ashamed to admit his error; he did not say "I did not hear this," but said, "I heard it and I forgot it."

(Talmud; Rashi)

He issued a proclamation to all the camp, saying: "I made an error in regard to the law, and Aaron my brother came and taught it me."

(Midrash Rabbah)

There are seven things that characterize a boor, and seven that characterize a wise man. A wise man does not speak before one who is greater than him in wisdom or age. He does not interrupt his fellow's words. He does not hasten to answer. His questions are on the subject and his answers to the point. He responds to first things first and to latter things later. Concerning what he did not hear, he says "I did not hear." He concedes to the truth. With the boor, the reverse of all these is the case.

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To set the Jewish calendar in accordance with the monthly birth of the new moon, and regard Nissan, the month of the Exodus, as "the head of months."

And G-d spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying: "This chodesh shall be to you the head of months; it shall be for you the first of the months of the year."

Also conveyed to Moses is the commandment to bring a "Passover offering" to G-d while still in the land of Egypt:

On the tenth day of this month, they shall take to them every man a lamb... a lamb for each household...

You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month; and the entire community of the congregation of Israel shall slaughter it towards evening.

They shall take the blood, and put it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses in which they shall eat it. And they shall eat the meat in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread: and with bitter herbs they shall eat it...

Thus shall you eat it: with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your band; you shall eat it in haste, it is G-d's Passover.

For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast: and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am G-d. And the blood shall be to you for a sign upon the houses where you are: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.

A seven-day festival beginning on this night (the eve of Nissan 15) should be established for all generations.

For on this very day I have brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt...

Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses... in all your habitations shall you eat matzot (unleavened bread).

## Commentary

"He does not interrupt his fellow's words"—this is Aaron, who though he had an answer to Moses' charge, waited in silence until Moses had concluded speaking. "He concedes to the truth"—this is Moses, who admitted that Aaron was in the right.

*(Ethics of the Fathers; Avot d'Rabbi Natan)*

**THESE ARE THE ANIMALS WHICH YOU MAY EAT... (11:2)** The birds and many of the mammals forbidden by the Torah are predators, while the permitted animals are not. We are commanded not to eat those animals possessive of a cruel nature, so that we should not absorb these qualities into ourselves.

*(Nachmanides)*

The great Kabbalist, Rabbi Isaac Luria, taught that every created thing possesses a "spark" of divine energy that constitutes its essence and soul. When a person utilizes something toward a G-dly end, he brings to light this divine spark, manifesting and realizing the purpose for which it was created. In all physical substances, a material "husk" (kelipah) encases and conceals the divine spark at its core, necessitating great effort on the part of man to access the spark without becoming enmeshed in the surface materiality.

No existence is devoid of a divine spark—indeed, nothing can exist without the pinpoint of G-dliness that imbues it with being and purpose. But not every spark can be actualized. There are certain "impregnable" elements whose sparks are inaccessible to us. The fact that something is forbidden by the Torah means that its husk cannot be penetrated, so that its spark remains locked within it and cannot be elevated.

Thus, one who eats a piece of kosher meat and then uses the energy gained from it to perform a mitzvah, thereby elevates the spark of divinity that is the essence of the meat, freeing it of its mundane incarnation and raising it to a state of fulfilled spirituality. However, if one would do the same with a piece of non-kosher meat, no such "elevation" would take place. Even if he applied the energy to positive and G-dly ends, this would not constitute a realization of the divine purpose in the meat's creation, since the consumption of the meat was an express

violation of the divine will.

This is the deeper significance of the Hebrew terms *assur* and *mutar* employed by Torah law for the forbidden and the permissible. *Assur*, commonly translated as "forbidden," literally means "bound," implying that these are things whose sparks the Torah has deemed bound and imprisoned in a shell of negativity and proscription. *Mutar* ("permitted"), which literally means "unbound," is the term for those sparks which the Torah has empowered us to extricate from their mundane embodiment and actively involve in our positive endeavors.

The "bound" elements of creation also have a role in the realization of the divine purpose outlined by the Torah. But theirs is a "negative" role—they exist so that we should achieve a conquest of self by resisting them. There is no Torah-authorized way in which they can actively be involved in our development of creation, no way in which they may themselves become part of the "dwelling for G-d" that we are charged to make of our world. Of these elements it is said, "Their breaking is their rectification." They exist to be rejected and defeated, and it is in their defeat and exclusion from our lives that their *raison d'être* is realized.

*(The Chassidic Masters)*

**THESE ARE THE ANIMALS WHICH YOU SHALL EAT AMONG ALL THE BEASTS THAT ARE UPON THE EARTH... OF ALL THAT ARE IN THE WATERS... AMONG THE BIRDS... (11:2, 9, 13)**

Land animals, which were created from the soil, are rendered fit to eat by the severing of both vital passages (the windpipe and the gullet). Fish, which were created from the water, do not require any *shechitah* to render them fit to eat. Birds, which were created from a mixture of soil and water, are rendered fit to eat with the severing of either one of the two vital passages.

*(Talmud, Chulin 27b)*

**BUT THESE YOU SHALL NOT EAT OF THEM THAT CHEW THE CUD, OR OF THEM THAT DIVIDE THE HOOF... (11:4)**

The Torah does not list the animals that have both kosher signs (and are thus kosher), nor does it list those which lack both (and are thus forbidden); but it

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does name the four animals—the camel, hyrax, hare, and the swine—that have one but not the other (making them, too, unfit for consumption for the Jew).

It is noteworthy that in the 33 centuries since G-d communicated these laws to Moses, entire continents, replete with many “new” and unimagined species have been discovered. A number of these hitherto unknown species possess both of the kosher signs, and many lack them both; but not a single one has been found with only one sign. The only such animals on earth are the four species enumerated by the Torah!

**AND THE SWINE, THOUGH HE DIVIDE THE HOOF AND BE CLOVENFOOTED, YET BE CHEWS NOT THE CUD; HE IS UNCLEAN TO YOU (11:7)**

Just as the swine when reclining puts forth its hooves as if to say, “See that I am kosher,” so too does the empire of Rome boast as it commits violence and robbery, under the guise of establishing a judicial tribunal. This may be compared to a governor who put to death the thieves, adulterers, and sorcerers. He leaned over to a counselor and said: “I myself did these three things in one night.”

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

**THESE SHALL YOU EAT OF ALL THAT ARE IN THE WATERS: WHATEVER HAS FINS AND SCALES (11:9)**

All fish that have scales also have fins (and are thus kosher). But there are fish that have fins but do not have scales, and are thus impure. If so, the Torah could have written only “scales,” without having to also write “fins”? ... Said Rabbi Abahu, and so it was learned in the study house of Rabbi Yishmael: This is so that “Torah be increased and made great” (Isaiah 42:21).

*(Talmud, Niddah 51b)*

The student of Torah is comparable to a fish in water, as in Rabbi Akiva's famous parable. His “fins” are the means by which he moves forward through the water—the intellect and study skills with which he advances in wisdom and “increases the Torah and makes it great” with his own contributions (chiddushim) to Torah learning. His “scales” are his protective armor against predators and adverse elements—his fear of Heaven, which shields his learning from error and distortion.

One might think that the primary requirement for success in Torah is the “fins,” while the “scales” serve a secondary function. It is the fins that move the fish forward, while the scales merely preserve what is. After all, learning is an intellectual exercise; piety and fear of G-d are lofty virtues, but are they any use in navigating the complexities of a difficult Tosafot?

In truth, however, the very opposite is the case. A scholar with fins but no scales is a non-kosher fish. He might swim and frolic with his talent and genius, but his learning is corrupt; it is not “Torah,” but his egoistic arrogation of the divine wisdom. On the other hand, the Talmud tells us that while there are fish with fins and no scales, all fish with scales have fins. If a person approaches Torah with an awe of its divine author and the commitment to serve Him, he will certainly succeed. Regardless of the degree of his intellectual prowess, he will find the “fins” with

which to advance in his learning and contribute to the growth of Torah.

*(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

**AND THESE ARE THEY WHICH YOU SHALL HAVE IN ABOMINATION AMONG THE BIRDS ... (11:13-19)**

In Hebrew, the 20 non-kosher species of bird are: neshet, peres, ozniyah, daah, ayah, oreiv, bat yaanah, tachmas, shachaf, netz, kops, shalach, yanshuf, tinshemet, kaat, racham, chassidah, anafah, duchifat, atalef.

The commentaries differ as to the identity of many of these species, so that the above translation reflects but one of many interpretations. An alternate rendition, based on traditional commentaries as researched by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan in his Living Torah, is: “eagle, ossifrage, osprey, kite, vulture family, the entire raven family, ostrich, owl, gull, hawk family, falcon, cormorant, ibis, swan, pelican, magpie, stork, heron family, hoopoe, and bat.”

Other interpretations include the following species in the list (while eliminating others): griffin vulture, albatross, woodpecker, goshawk, long-eared owl, and/or capercaillie.

The Talmud offers a number of identifying markers that are common to kosher fowl, including the fact that they are not predators. In practice, Torah law rules that due to the many uncertainties as to the precise identity of the non-kosher birds listed by the Torah, only birds with a tradition of Kashrut should be eaten.

**AND EVERY EARTHEN VESSEL INTO WHICH ANY OF THEM FALL... SHALL BE UNCLEAN (11:33)**

If the source of impurity enters within the space of an earthen vessel—even without touching its walls—it becomes impure. If it did not enter into it, even if it touched it from the outside, it remains pure.

With all other utensils, the opposite is the case: entering within them alone does not make them impure, while touching any part of them does.

*(Talmud, Chulin 24b; Rashi)*

The worth of a utensil of wood or metal is not only in its function as a container—the material of which it is made also has value. So contact with any part of it, including its outside surface, affects its ritual state. On the other hand, an earthen utensil, whose body is mere earth, has value only as a container; accordingly it is affected only by what happens to its inside. Indeed, its inside is therefore even more susceptible to contamination than that of other utensils.

Man is an earthen vessel (“And G-d formed man out of the dust of the earth, and He blew into his nostril a living soul”—Genesis 2:7). His worth lies not in his material exterior, but in its content. He should therefore regard as significant only what pertains to his inner self.

*(The Rebbe of Kotzk)*

**A WELLSPRING OR POOL (MIKVEH)... SHALL BE PURE (11:36)**

A wellspring purifies regardless of the amount of the water it contains, and also when flowing; a mikveh purifies only when stationary, and must contain 40 se'ah (approx. 87.5 gallons) of water.

*(Torat Kohanim)*

When a person endeavors to venture forth on his own, relying on his own intellect and feelings to guide him in the proper path, he had best be well equipped for the

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task. For he is then a mikveh, a pool of water no longer in direct contact with its source, which must possess a minimum of so many "gallons" of understanding and fortitude. Furthermore, he must be "stationary," contained and delimited by walls outside of himself; for without such objective control he is susceptible to all sorts of distortions and corruptions. A mikveh that lacks these criteria not only fails to purify other things, but is also itself vulnerable to contamination.

On the other hand, one who is a "wellspring," disavowing all pretensions of a "separate identity" from his Source, has no such limitations. His intellect may not be the deepest, his talents quite unspectacular, but the little he has can effectively take on the most challenging of tasks. Nor does he require any confining walls or "closed communities" to safeguard his integrity: wherever he goes and flows, he has a positive effect on his environment and is never negatively influenced by its imperfections. For no matter how scant his resources, and no matter where he ventures forth, he maintains an unbroken attachment to his Source.

*(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

**TO DIFFERENTIATE THE PURE AND THE IMPURE, AND BETWEEN THE ANIMAL THAT MAY BE EATEN AND THE ANIMAL THAT MAY NOT BE EATEN (11:47)**

Need this be said regarding the difference between a donkey and a cow? ...

Rather, this is to tell us to differentiate between the animal which had half its windpipe cut [during the slaughtering] and the animal which had most of its windpipe cut (According to the laws of shechitah, ritual slaughter, if a majority of the windpipe is not severed in an uninterrupted motion of the slaughterer's knife, the animal is rendered tereifah and unfit for consumption)...

Need this be said regarding the difference between a wild ass and a deer? Rather, this is to tell us to differentiate between an animal in which there developed a defect yet remains fit to be eaten and an animal in which there developed a defect which renders it unfit to be eaten.

*(Torat Kohanim; Rashi)*

THIS CHODESH (NEW MOON, MONTH) SHALL BE TO YOU THE HEAD OF MONTHS; IT SHALL BE FOR YOU THE FIRST OF THE MONTHS OF THE YEAR (EXODUS 12:2)

G-d showed Moses the new moon at its moment of rebirth, and said to him:

"When the moon is reborn, mark the beginning of a new month."

*(Mechilta)*

There was a large courtyard in Jerusalem called Beth Ya'azek, where all the witnesses (who had seen the appearance of the new moon) used to assemble, and the bet-din (rabbinical court) used to examine them. They used to entertain them lavishly there, so that they should have an inducement to come...

The pair of witnesses who arrived first were cross-examined first. The senior of them was brought in and they said to him: "Tell us how you saw the moon -- in front of the sun or behind the sun? to the north of it or the south? how big was it, and in which direction was it inclined? and how broad was it? ... Rabban Gamaliel used to have diagrams of the phases of the moon on a tablet on the wall of his upper chamber, and he used to show them to the unlearned and ask, "Did it look like this or this?" ...

After that they would bring in the second witness and question him. If their

accounts tallied, their evidence was accepted. The other pairs were questioned briefly -- not because they were required at all, but so that they should not be disappointed and discouraged from coming (the next time).

The head of the bet-din would then proclaim: "Sanctified!", and all the people would repeat after him, "Sanctified! Sanctified!"

*(Talmud, Rosh Hashanah ch. 2)*

What blessing was to be recited by one who beholds the new moon, in the period when Israel used to sanctify the new month? Some of the Sages hold: "Blessed be He who renews the months." Others say: "Blessed be He who consecrates the months." And others say: "Blessed be He who hallows Israel," since unless Israel sanctifies it, it is not sanctified at all.

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

The people of Israel set their calendar by the moon, because they are the moon of the world.

*(Zohar)*

The moon begins to shine on the first of the month and increases in luminance till the fifteenth day, when her orb becomes full; from the fifteenth till the thirtieth day, her light wanes, till on the thirtieth it is not seen at all. With Israel too, there were fifteen generations from Abraham to Solomon. Abraham began to shine... Jacob added to this light... and after them came Judah, Perez, Chetzron, Ram, Aminadav, Nachshon, Samuel, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, David. When Solomon appeared, the moon's orb was full... Henceforth the kings began to diminish in power... With Zedekiah [in whose time the Holy Temple was destroyed] the light of the moon dimmed entirely.

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

It is written (Genesis 1:16), "And G-d made the two great luminaries"; but then it says, "The great luminary... and the small luminary"? [Indeed, at first they were both great; but then] the moon said to G-d: Master of the Universe! Can two kings wear the same crown? Said G-d to her: Go diminish yourself. Said she to Him: Master of the Universe! Because I have said a proper thing, I must diminish myself? Said He to her: You may rule both during the day and at night. Said she to Him: What advantage is there in that? What does a lamp accomplish at high noon? Said He to her: The people of Israel shall calculate their dates and years by you. Said she to Him: But the sun, too, shall have a part in that, for they shall calculate the seasons by him.

Said G-d: The righteous shall be called by your name -- Jacob the Small, 'Samuel the Small, David the Small.

Still G-d saw that the moon was not appeased. So G-d said: Offer an atonement for My sake, for My having diminished the moon. This is the significance of what Reish Lakish said: Why does the he-goat offered on Rosh Chodesh (the first of the month) differ from the others in that it is specified as for G-d? G-d is saying: This he-goat shall atone for My diminishing of the moon.

*(Talmud, Chulin 60b)*

The months of the year are lunar months, as it is written: "... This chodesh shall be to you the head of months." So said our sages: G-d showed Moses the figure of the [new] moon in a prophetic vision, and said to him: "Thus you should see and sanctify."

However, the years which we figure are solar years, as it is written: "Keep the month of spring" (i.e., ensure that the month of Passover is always in the spring season).

The solar year is eleven days longer than a year of [twelve] lunar months. Therefore, when this surplus accumulates to the amount of 30 days -- either a little more or a little less -- one adds an extra month so that the year has 13 months; this is what is called

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a shanah meuberet ("pregnant year"). Because one cannot make the year to consist of so many months plus so many days, since the verse says, "[It shall be for you the first of] the months of the year" -- implying that the year should consist of months, and months only.

The moon is concealed each month, and remains invisible for approximately two days -- for about one day before it is closest to the sun and about one day after it is closest to the sun, after which it can be seen in the west in the evening. The night on which it is visible in the west marks the beginning of the month, and one counts from that day 29 days. If the moon is visible on the eve of the 30th, then the 30th day is Rosh Chodesh ("head of the month"); if not, then the 31st day is Rosh Chodesh, and the 30th day belongs to the previous month.

*(Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Sanctification of the Month)*

Time is the first creation (see Sforno on Genesis 1:1); thus, the sanctification of time is the first mitzvah commanded to Israel.

*(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

THE HEAD OF MONTHS (EXODUS 12:2)

When G-d chose His world, He established heads of months and years. When He chose Jacob and his sons, He established the head of the month of redemption.

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

Thus there are two "heads" to the Jewish year. The 1st of Tishrei (Rosh Hashanah), the day of the creation of man, is the head of the natural year--the year which the Jew shares with all of creation. The month of Nissan, marking the Exodus and the birth of Israel, is the head of a miraculous year: a dimension of time, inhabited solely by the Jew, in which the miraculous--i.e., the power to transcend nature and norm--is the very stuff and substance of life.

*(The Chassidic Masters)*

ON THE TENTH DAY OF THIS MONTH, THEY SHALL TAKE TO THEM EVERY MAN A LAMB... YOU SHALL KEEP IT UNTIL THE 14TH DAY OF THE SAME MONTH; AND THE WHOLE ASSEMBLY OF THE CONGREGATION OF ISRAEL SHALL SLAUGHTER IT TOWARDS EVENING (12:3-6)

When G-d told Moses to slay the paschal lamb, Moses said: "Master of the Universe! How can I possibly do this thing? Don't You know the lamb is the Egyptian god? 'Lo, if we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us?'"

Said G-d: "By your life, Israel will not depart from here before they slaughter the Egyptian gods before their very eyes, that I may teach them that their gods are really nothing at all." This is what He actually did; for on that night He slew the Egyptian firstborn, and on that night the Israelites slaughtered their paschal lamb and ate it.

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

That year, the 10th of Nissan was a Shabbat; this is why the Shabbat before Passover is called Shabbat HaGadol ("The Great Shabbat") -- because a great miracle happened on that day. For when the Children of Israel took their paschal lambs on that Shabbat, the Egyptian firstborn converged on them and asked them:

"Why are you doing this?" They replied: "It is a passover sacrifice to G-d, for He will kill the firstborn of Egypt." The firstborn approached their fathers and Pharaoh to request that Israel be allowed to go, but they refused; so the firstborn waged war against them, killing many of them. Thus the verse (Psalms 136:10) proclaims: "[Offer thanks] to He who smote the Egyptian with their firstborn."

*(Tosofot on Talmud, Shabbat 87b)*

I WILL PASS THROUGH THE LAND OF EGYPT THIS NIGHT, AND WILL SMITE ALL THE FIRST-BORN IN THE LAND OF EGYPT... AND AGAINST ALL THE GODS OF EGYPT I WILL EXECUTE JUDGMENTS: I AM G-D (12:12)

"I will pass" -- I, and no angel; "I will smite" -- I, and no seraph; "I will execute" -- I, and no messenger; "I am G-d" -- I am He, and no other.

*(Passover Haggadah)*

AND AGAINST ALL THE GODS OF EGYPT I WILL EXECUTE JUDGMENTS (12:12)

Those that were of wood rotted; those that were of metal melted.

*(Rashi)*

SEVEN DAYS SHALL THERE BE NO LEAVEN FOUND IN YOUR HOUSES (12:19)

On the eve of the fourteenth [of Nissan] a search is made for leaven by the light of a candle... Why a candle? So that it can be brought into holes and chinks [in the wall].

*(Talmud, Pesachim 2a, 8b)*

There are other foods whose consumption is forbidden by the Torah; but leaven on Passover is forbidden to eat, benefit from in any way, or even keep in our possession. Usually, a forbidden substance becomes "nullified" if it mixes with a much greater quantity of permissible substances; of leaven, the Torah forbids even the slightest trace.

This is a reflection of what these "forbidden foods" represent on the spiritual level. Leaven is that which rises and inflates itself; in the human character, "leaven" is the trait of pride. While many negative traits can be useful in small, greatly diluted doses, the leaven of the soul must be utterly rejected. Thus the Talmud (Erchin 15b) states that G-d says of the arrogant one, "I and he cannot dwell in the same world," and Maimonides writes that while in all character traits one should follow the "golden mean," regarding the trait of pride, one must avoid it entirely and follow the path of consummate humility. Like chametz on Passover, we must abandon any attempt to exploit it, and must totally eradicate it from every nook and cranny of our hearts.

*(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

## PARSHAH SUMMARY &amp; COMMENTARY

## Havdalah

## From the Chassidic Masters

*If there is no daat (discriminating intelligence), how can there be differentiation?*

Jerusalem Talmud, Berachot 5:2

In the Jewish home, the close of the Shabbat is marked with a special ceremony, called Havdalah (differentiation). Over a brimming cup of wine, to the multi-flamed light of a braided candle and the smell of aromatic spices, we recite: "Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d... Who differentiates between the holy and the mundane, between light and darkness, between Israel and the nations, between the seventh day and the six days of work."

Differentiation is at the heart of what we call morality. If theft or adultery are wrong, it is only because there is a real difference between mine and yours and between the wedded and the unwedded state. If ceasing work on Shabbat or eating matzah on Passover are meaningful deeds, this is only because Shabbat is truly different from Friday and matzah is truly different from leavened bread. If there is meaning and purpose to our actions, there must be true significance to the differences between things.

Differentiation, however, also implies a sameness to the things being differentiated. If Shabbat and Sunday looked, smelled and tasted differently to our physical senses, there would be no need to actively differentiate between them. Indeed, when the Torah employs the verb to differentiate (*lehavdil*), it is to distinguish between things that are essentially similar. A case in point is the concluding verse of Leviticus 11, the chapter which lays down the kashrut dietary laws. The verse reads: "To differentiate between the pure and the impure; between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten," regarding which our sages remark:

Need this be said regarding the difference between a donkey and a cow? ... Rather, this is to tell us to differentiate between the animal which had half its windpipe cut [during the slaughtering] and the animal which had most of its windpipe cut.... Need this be said regarding the difference between a wild ass and a deer? Rather, this is to tell us to differentiate between an animal in which there developed a defect yet remains fit to be eaten and an animal in which there developed a defect which renders it unfit to be eaten (Rashi on verse, from *Torat Kohanim*).

In other words, havdalah requires the ability to look at two similar things and appreciate that, despite their elementary similarity, they are to be differentiated and held apart. In the words of our sages, If there is no daat (dis-

criminating intelligence), how can there be havdalah?

A World of Words

The capacity to differentiate, as we have noted, is the basis for any moral vision of life. Chassidic teaching takes this a step further, demonstrating how havdalah is the essence of the created existence, of what we call reality.

An axiom of the Jewish faith is that G-d is infinite--without beginning and without end. This raises the problem, addressed by all major Jewish philosophers, of how our world can possibly exist, since a truly infinite being precludes the existence of anything other than itself. Indeed, the Torah asserts that There is nothing else besides Him. But what about ourselves, our world, our reality? Are these not existences besides Him?

In his *Tanya*, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi lays the groundwork for a resolution of this problem by defining the created reality as divine speech. In the first chapter of Genesis, G-d's creation of the world is described as a series of (ten) utterances: "G-d said, Let there be light! and there was light; G-d said Let the earth sent forth vegetation, Let there be luminaries in the heavens, Let the waters spawn living creatures, and plants, stars and fish emerged into existence." Citing teachings from the Midrash, the Kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria and Chassidism's founder Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, Rabbi Schneur Zalman deduces that these divine utterances are not merely the cause of these existences--they are these existences. What we experience as light is but the embodiment of G-d's articulated desire that there be light; what we experience as a tree is but the embodiment of G-d's articulated desire that there be a tree.

So the created reality is not, in truth, something else besides Him, any more than our spoken words are things distinct of ourselves. Speaking is a creative act; but when we speak we are not creating anything that is other than ourselves--we are giving vocal form to our own ideas, feelings and desires. In describing G-d's creation of the world as a series of divine utterances, the Torah wishes to convey the idea that the world is not something distinct of its Creator, but His spoken words--His articulation of concepts and potentials which are an integral part of His being.

The implications of such a conception of ourselves and our world--of reality as divine speech--are numerous and manifold. One is the realization that the differences between things are secondary to a primary sameness that embraces them all. A language might include millions of words, but these are all variations on a handful of consonants and vowels. On a more basic level, these consonants and vowels are just variations on how a minute expulsion of breath is bounced off the speaker's vocal cords, tongue, palate, teeth and lips.

A tree might seem very different from a ray of light, as might a fish from a star. But each of these objects is, in essence, the same thing: a divine word, an articulation of divine will. In origin, they share a singular essence; their differentiation occurs at a latter stage, as they pass through the divine mouth that imparts to them their respective forms and

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characteristics.

Thus the Torah relates how, on the first day of creation, G-d differentiated between light and darkness. What can be more different than light and darkness? What differentiation is necessary between such obviously different phenomena? But light and darkness are both creations of G-d; both are divine words, formulations of the same surge of divine will. Their distinction is the product of a divine act of havdalah, of a deliberate differentiation between two essentially synonymous realities.

## Daat

In light of this, we can better understand the above-quoted Talmudic dictum regarding the connection between daat and havdalah. The Talmud is discussing the fact that in the evening prayers recited after the close of Shabbat, the text of the Havdalah is inserted in the prayer which begins: "You grant daat to man, and teach the human being understanding; grant us, from You, wisdom, understanding and knowledge..." The reason for this placement, says the Talmud, is that "If there is no daat, how can there be havdalah?"

On the most basic level, the Talmud is saying that an act of havdalah requires the discriminating intelligence of daat. On a deeper level, it is saying that havdalah is possible only because "You grant daat to man"--only because G-d Himself grants us the capacity to differentiate between various elements of His creation.

For if the world is divine speech, if all created things are essentially the same, how can we differentiate between them? And if we do differentiate, what significance can there be to our differentiation? We might discern light and darkness; we might identify certain things as holy and others as mundane; we might designate the first six days of the week for material achievement and its seventh day for spiritual rest; but if all of these are, in essence, divine words, what power have we to differentiate between them?

But G-d wanted a moral world--a world in which the deeds of man are purposeful and meaningful. So He imparted variety, diversity and distinction to His creation, decreeing that the differences between things should possess import and significance. His act of creation was an act of havdalah--of differentiating between essentially similar entities. And He granted the human being a mind capable of appreciating the paradox of havdalah--the paradox of meaningful difference imposed upon intrinsic synonymy--thereby empowering us to implement, through our awareness and our actions, the differentia-

tions He decreed in His world.

## The Second Paradox

Havdalah carries another paradox--that its ultimate function is to join and unite the very things it comes to differentiate.

The Torah commands us to remember and to preserve the day of Shabbat--to distinguish it, in mind, word and deed, from the six days of work. Yet Shabbat is integrally bound to the other days of the week. It is the culmination of our week-day endeavors--the day on which all that we labored for and achieved in the preceding six days ascends on high, attaining its most complete and perfect realization. And Shabbat is the day from which all days are blessed--the source of the fortitude and energy that drives our efforts of the workweek that follows it.

We are told to preserve our uniqueness as Jews--to safeguard the delineation between Israel and the nations. Yet the people of Israel are designated to serve as a light unto the nations, as the conveyers of the ethos and ideals of Torah to all inhabitants of the earth.

We are instructed to differentiate between the holy and the mundane--to embrace what is sacred and G-dly in our lives while exercising wariness and restraint in the material aspects of life. At the same time, we are told that the purpose of man's creation, and of the creation of all worlds, spiritual and material is to make for G-d a dwelling place in the lowly realms--to involve our everyday material pursuits in the quest to know and serve G-d, thereby making Him at home in the lowliest, most mundane stratum of creation.

For it is only through our awareness and enforcement of the boundaries within creation that these objectives can be achieved. Only if Shabbat is preserved in its distinctiveness and transcendence can it elevate and empower the other six days of the week. Only in their uniqueness as G-d's chosen people does the nation of Israel have anything of true value to offer the peoples of the world. Only when our spiritual life is kept inviolably apart from the coarsening influence of the material can it in turn sanctify the material by enlisting it to serve its spiritual aims.

## From Unity to Symphony

Havdalah is the substance of our daily lives, as every hour and moment confronts us with the challenge to define and differentiate--to distinguish between right and wrong, between holy and mundane. But these delineations are merely a means to an end, a process springing from a primordial unity and leading toward a future synthesis.

In origin and essence, all is one. But an even deeper unity is achieved when differentiations and demarcations are imposed upon the primordial oneness, and its component parts are each given a distinct role in creations symphonious expression of the goodness and perfection of its Creator.

*Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe; adapted by Yanki Tauber*