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date: Wed, Mar 30, 2016 at 1:29 PM subject: Parshat Shmini 5776- Rabbi Berel Wein Weekly Parsha SHMINI Rabbi Wein's Weekly
The temptations of power are great. When one achieves notoriety, success and exalted public service there is always a danger that hubris and unnecessary behavior will take over. This is true even regarding great, noble and holy people. The adage that power corrupts has remained one of the truisms of all of human behavior throughout the ages. When the Torah describes the death of the two sons of Aaron because they substituted their own judgment for G-D's explicit commandment, we should not be overly surprised at the incident. Granted the privilege of the priesthood, a privilege that at that time was restricted to only five individuals, Nadav and Avihu followed their natural human instinct to "improve" on G-D's word and to fashion a service more in line with their own desires and values. As the Torah points out to us, their sin was that they brought a strange fire on G-D's altar, "which they were not commanded to do." The age-old question of whether the Temple service, and in our times the prayer service, is meant to fashion G-D or humans is brought into sharp focus by the events described in this week's Torah reading. In bringing this strange fire on G-D's altar, Nadav and Avihu may have thought that they were making the service in the Mishkan/Tabernacle more attractive and appealing. The nature of humans always is that we second-guess our Creator, mostly to our detriment if not even disaster. Judaism has always found itself in constant struggle and tension regarding the nature of its ordained, ritual service on one hand and its relevance and appeal to the masses of Jews on the other. This is certainly true in our time with the pressures of modernity, rapidly changing social mores and conventional correctness. Traditional Judaism has always been wary of change, especially sudden, culturally driven radical change to its prayer structure and value system. It is obvious to all that over the centuries the modes of prayer service that have evolved would enable a Jew of the eleventh century, were he to be alive today, to recognize the basic prayer structure, but he would certainly notice changes in content and form that developed in the Jewish world over the past millennia. The decisions to accept, modify or reject any changes in the prayer service lay not so much in

the hands of the rabbinic scholars as it did in the general consensus of the masses of Jews who prayed daily in the synagogues. This is certainly true regarding the changes in prayer – content, form and behavior – brought about by the rise of the Chasidic movement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, all adjustments and changes were always within the framework of halacha and never meant to be a departure from tradition and/or a "new" Judaism. The motivation for all of the current discussion regarding prayer services, women's issues and other societal factors should be closely examined. We should never again make the mistake that the Torah records for us in this week's reading regarding the sons of Aaron. Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein Subscribe to our blog via email or RSS to get more posts like this one.

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Covenant & Conversation
Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Shmini(Leviticus 9-11) The Dangers of Enthusiasm Excavating the history of words can sometimes be as revealing as excavating the ruins of an ancient city. Take the English word "enthusiasm". Today we see this as something positive. One dictionary defines it as "a feeling of energetic interest in a particular subject or activity and an eagerness to be involved in it." People with enthusiasm have passion, zest and excitement, and this can be contagious. It is one of the gifts of a great teacher or leader. People follow people of passion. If you want to influence others, cultivate enthusiasm. But the word did not always have a favorable connotation. Originally it referred to someone possessed by a spirit or demon. In the seventeenth century England, it came to refer to extreme and revolutionary Protestant sects, and more generally to the Puritans who fought the English Civil War. It became a synonym for religious extremism, zealotry and fanaticism. It was looked on as irrational, volatile and dangerous. David Hume (1711-1776), the Scottish philosopher, wrote a fascinating essay on the subject.[1] He begins by noting that "the corruption of the best things produces the worst," and that is especially true of religion. There are, he says, two ways in which religion can go wrong: through superstition, and through enthusiasm. These are quite different phenomena. Superstition is driven by ignorance and fear. We can sometimes have irrational anxieties and terrors, and we deal with them by resorting to equally irrational remedies. Enthusiasm is the opposite. It is the result of over-confidence. The enthusiast, in a state of high religious rapture, comes to believe that he is being inspired by G-D himself, and is thus empowered to disregard reason and restraint. Enthusiasm "thinks itself sufficiently qualified to approach the Divinity, without any human mediator." The person in its grip is so full of what he takes to be holy rapture that he feels able to override the rules by which priestly conduct is normally governed. "The fanatic consecrates himself and bestows on his own person a sacred character, much superior to what forms and ceremonious institutions can confer on any other." Rules and regulations, thinks the enthusiast, are for ordinary people, not for us. We, inspired by G-D, know better. That, said Hume, can be very dangerous indeed. We now have a precise description of the sin for which Nadav and Avihu, the two elder sons of Aaron, died. Clearly the Torah regards their death as highly significant because it refers to it on no less than four occasions (Lev. 10:1-2, 16:1, Num. 3:4, 26:61). It was a shocking tragedy, occurring as it did on the day of the inauguration of the service of the Mishkan, a moment that should have been one of the great celebrations in Jewish history. The sages themselves were puzzled by the episode. The text itself merely says that "they offered unauthorised fire [esh zarah] before the Lord, that He had not commanded. So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord." Evidently the sages felt that there must have been something else, some further sin or character flaw, to justify so dire and drastic a

punishment. Putting together clues in the biblical text, some speculated that they were guilty of entering the Holy of Holies;[2] that they had given a ruling of their own accord without consulting Moses or Aaron; that they had become intoxicated; that they were not properly robed; that they had not purified themselves with water from the laver; that they were so self-important that they had not married, thinking no woman was good enough for them; or that they were impatient for Moses and Aaron to die so they could become the leaders of Israel. Some speculated that the sin for which they were punished did not happen on that day at all. It had occurred months earlier at Mount Sinai. The text says that Nadav and Avihu along with seventy elders ascended the mountain and "saw the G-D of Israel" (Ex. 24:10). G-D "did not raise his hand against the leaders of the Israelites; they saw G-D, and they ate and drank" (Ex. 24:11). The implication is that they deserved punishment then for not averting their eyes, or for eating and drinking at so sacred an encounter. But G-D delayed the punishment so as not to cause grief on the day He made a covenant with the people.[3] These are all midrashic interpretations: true, valid and important but not the plain sense of the verse. The text is clear. On each of the three occasions where their death is mentioned, the Torah says merely that they offered "unauthorised fire." The sin was that they did something that had not been commanded. They did so, surely, for the highest motives. Moses said to Aaron immediately after they died that this is what G-D had meant when he said, "Among those who are near me I will be sanctified" (Lev. 10:3). A midrash says that Moses was comforting his brother by saying, "They were closer to G-D than you or me." [4] The history of the word "enthusiasm", though, helps us understand the episode. Nadav and Avihu were "enthusiasts", not in the contemporary sense but in the sense in which the word was used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Enthusiasts were people who, full of religious passion, believed that G-D was inspiring them to do deeds in defiance of law and convention. They were very holy but they were also potentially very dangerous. David Hume in particular saw that enthusiasm in this sense is diametrically opposed to the mindset of priesthood. In his words, "all enthusiasts have been free from the yoke of ecclesiastics, and have expressed great independence of devotion; with a contempt of forms, ceremonies, and traditions." Priests understand the power, and thus the potential danger, of the sacred. That is why holy places, times and rituals must be guarded with rules, the way a nuclear power station must be protected by the most careful insulation. Think of the accidents that have occurred when this has failed: Chernobyl, for example, or Fukushima in Japan in 2011. The results can be devastating and lasting. To bring unauthorized fire to the Tabernacle might seem a small offence, but a single unauthorized act in the realm of the holy causes a breach in the laws around the sacred that can grow in time to a gaping hole. Enthusiasm, harmless though it might be in some of its manifestations, can quickly become extremism, fanaticism and religiously motivated violence. That is what happened in Europe during the wars of religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and it is happening in some religions today. As David Hume observed: "Human reason and even morality are rejected [by enthusiasts] as fallacious guides, and the fanatic madman delivers himself over blindly" to what he believes to be Divine inspiration, but what may in fact be overheated self-importance or frenzied rage. We now understand in detail that the human brain contains two different systems, what Daniel Kahneman calls "thinking fast and slow". The fast brain, the limbic system, gives rise to emotions, particularly in response to fear. The slow brain, the prefrontal cortex, is rational, deliberative, and capable of thinking through the long term consequences of alternative courses of action. It is no accident that we have both systems. Without instinctive responses triggered by danger we would not survive. But without the slower, deliberative brain we would find ourselves time and again engaging in destructive and self-destructive behavior. Individual happiness and the survival of civilization depend on striking a delicate balance between the two. Precisely because it gives rise to such intense passions, the religious life in particular needs the constraints of

law and ritual, the entire intricate minuet of worship, so that the fire of faith is contained, giving light and a glimpse of the glory of G-D. Otherwise it can eventually become a raging inferno, spreading destruction and claiming lives. After many centuries in the West, we have tamed enthusiasm to the point where we can think of it as a positive force. We should never forget, however, that it was not always so. That is why Judaism contains so many laws and so much attention to detail - and the closer we come to G-D, the more we need. NOTES:

1. David Hume, "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm," in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary* (1742-1754).
2. This is based on the statement in Lev. 16:1, that the two sons of Aaron died when "they drew near before the Lord," implying that they had come too close, i.e. they had entered the Holy of Holies.
3. The seventy elders were punished later. See Rashi to Ex. 24:10.
4. Midrash Aggadah (Buber) ad loc. Published: March 27, 201

http://www.kashrut.com/articles/soul_food/

Soul Food The Jewish Dietary Laws

by Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Yeshiva Ohr Somayach

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Few activities are as instinctive as eating, and few activities have such a profound impact on us physiologically, psychologically and spiritually. Many people do not give much thought to when, what and how they eat until their cardiologist tells them to lower their cholesterol or their friends begin to ask if they are pregnant (for men this question is especially disturbing). Jews who observe the dietary laws (kashrut) however, must make regular decisions about what they eat, when they eat it and how they prepare their food; so that for the observant Jew eating ceases to be a totally instinctive activity. The dietary laws force us to stop and think about daily activities and deter us from going through life in autopilot. In order to understand what the Torah wants us focus on, and to understand the philosophy of kashrut, it is necessary to be superficially familiar with the kashrut laws themselves. Following is a brief overview:

A kosher animal must be a ruminant and have split hooves -- cows, sheep, goats and deer are all kosher, whereas camels and pigs (having each only one sign of kashrut) are not kosher. Most common fowl are kosher, like chickens, ducks and geese, but the birds of prey (hawks, eagles etc.) are not kosher. A sea creature is only kosher if it has fins and scales. So most species of fish are kosher (tuna, salmon, flounder, etc.) but all shellfish are not kosher; dolphins, whales and squids are also not kosher. Any food product of a non-kosher animal is also non-kosher. The exception to this rule is bee's honey.

An animal or bird must be slaughtered according to Jewish law (shechita). This involves cutting the animal's trachea and oesophagus (the carotid and jugular are also severed) with a surgically sharp knife. The cut must be swift, continuous and performed by an expert. This method of slaughter reduces the blood pressure in the brain to zero immediately, so that the animal loses consciousness in a few seconds and dies in minutes. The animal or bird must be free of *treifot*, which are 70 different categories of injuries, diseases or abnormalities whose presence renders the animal non-kosher. Certain fats, known as *chelev*, may not be eaten. Blood must be removed from the meat, either by soaking, salting and rinsing or by broiling. The sciatic nerve in each leg and the surrounding fat must be removed. It is forbidden to cook, eat, or benefit from milk and meat mixtures. It is also forbidden to cook or eat dairy products together with poultry. In Israel, tithes must be taken from all crops. If these tithes are not separated then the produce may not be eaten; the wheat, barley or fruit is actually not kosher until the commandments of tithing have been fulfilled. Milk products (including the rennet in cheese) must only come from kosher animals. The most obvious idea behind kashrut is self-control and discipline. Let me illustrate this with a real-life example. Most parents are familiar with the horrors of going to the

supermarket with young children. The worst part of this ordeal is waiting in line at the checkout counter. You have only five items, so you wait in the "Eight-items-or-less" express line. The lady in front of you has 25 items at least, she is trying to pay with a third-party check from Paraguay in Thai baht, and is negotiating with the clerk over her expired coupons (and her mortgage). You are waiting with two children under the age of six, surrounded on both sides by four foot high walls of sugar based products. The children are becoming increasingly impatient and begging for candies, and you are becoming more and more angry and frustrated as time goes on. Of course, most children will scream, beg and embarrass their parents into buying the candy. Now for the true story. I moved with my family from Israel to Toronto for a four-year stay, and in the first week was waiting in line at the supermarket with one of my children. He asked me for a chocolate bar. I looked at the bar and told him that it was not kosher and he was silent, accepting the decision without tantrums, threats, tears or hysteria. It struck me then that my five-year-old, who has been brought up with the laws of kashrut, had more self-control than millions of adults in the Western world. How many people accept "no" as an answer in denial of a pleasure that they want now? Dangerous? I will take precautions. Unhealthy? I will stop after a few. Addictive? Not to me. Not to indulge is simply not an option. I once read an interview with a famous politician whose motto was "A kinder, gentler America." The interview was conducted while he was engaged in hunting grouse. No one seemed to notice the contradiction between his recreational activity and his motto. How can one derive entertainment from pursuing and killing an animal and at the same time espouse a "kinder, gentler America?" In the words of a great Rabbi "I am amazed by this activity [hunting]; we have not found hunters in the Torah except for Nimrod and Esau. This is not the way of the sons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob ... it is written 'His [G-d's] mercy is upon all His creatures' ... if so how can an Israelite kill living beings, without any other need than in order to pass his time by hunting! This matter contributes to cruelty, and is forbidden...." In Jewish tradition we are allowed to use animals as food and clothing; however, we are not supposed to rejoice in this, and we are certainly not supposed to make a sport of it. Some of the laws of kashrut are designed to prevent us from becoming callous and cruel and to discourage hunting as a form of recreation or sustenance. The requirements of shechita and treifot virtually preclude the possibility of hunting. The prohibition against meat and milk also serves to remind us where our food comes from. The meat is from a dead animal, the milk from a living animal. Be aware that obtaining meat necessitates death, obtaining milk requires life. These are foods that have their origin in living creatures and keeping them separate makes us aware of their source. This is similar to the law that allows us to wear clothing of leather, but suggests that we do not wish our friend to "Wear it out," because getting a new one involves the death of an animal. The Hebrew word for "charity" -- "tzedaka" -- is correctly translated as "justice." We do not look at giving to the poor as something beyond the call of duty, we perceive it as simple justice. Hence we can understand why the Torah prohibits a Jewish farmer from eating the produce of his own field until he has given tithes to those without land of their own. He is not being asked to be extra nice, he is being commanded to be just. The types of animals we eat are chosen in part for their symbolism. The ruminants that have split hooves tend to be tranquil, domesticated animals that have no natural weapons. These are animals whose characteristics we may absorb through eating. We may not eat scavengers, carnivores or birds of prey; these are not characteristics that we want to absorb at all. There is no question that kashrut has contributed to our survival as a distinct nation as well. Jews all over the world have common dietary patterns. I can be confident that the curried hamin of the Calcutta Jews has no milk with meat in its ingredients. When I eat kosher, French cuisine, I know that the meat is not pork and that the animals have been slaughtered according to law. Jews meet each other at the local kosher bakery, they shop at the same stores and have their own butchers. These laws are a major force in maintaining unity, act as a social

barrier against assimilation, and create a feeling of community amongst the Jewish People. Another aspect of kashrut is the encouragement of aesthetic sensitivity. Judaism prohibits the consumption of animals that have died of natural causes or that are deformed and diseased; it also prohibits the consumption of insects and loathsome foods. It is possible that one idea behind this is to encourage us to view ourselves with dignity and to act with dignity. One of the best defences against immorality is a strong sense of self-esteem and dignity. Evil should be looked at as beneath our dignity, stealing is stooping too low, gossip is petty and small-minded. In order to help us achieve and maintain this level of dignity the Torah prohibits foods like carcasses and diseased animals. Some religions seek the path to spirituality through withdrawal from the physical world. A monastic life is glorified, celibacy and asceticism are seen as ideals. Some view the human as essentially an animal that is incapable of elevating itself beyond the struggle for survival, hence they encourage a life of hedonism and materialism. Judaism sees the human as an essentially spiritual being, clothed in a physical body. Judaism maintains that the physical is not evil, it is just not the complete view of reality. Judaism seeks to elevate the physical world, not to deny it, nor to glorify it. The laws of kashrut allow us to enjoy the pleasures of the physical world, but in such a way that we sanctify and elevate the pleasure through consciousness and sensitivity. Kashrut recognises that the essential human need is not food, drink or comfort, but meaning. Judaism, through the dietary laws, injects meaning even into something as commonplace and instinctive as eating. References: The Jewish Dietary Laws, Isidore Grunfeld, Soncino Press, London. Shechita: Religious, Historical and Scientific Perspectives, Munk, Feldheim Publishers, New York, 1976 Responsa Nodah Biyehudah, Rabbi Yechezkel Landau, Yoreh Deah 10 Code of Jewish Law, Orach Chaim 223:6 Rema ad loc. The Royal Table, Jacob Cohn Comments to webmaster@kashrut.com © Copyright 2015 Scharf Associates

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Thursday, March 31, 2016

Waiting For A Sibling

Halachic Musings

By **Rabbi Yair Hoffman**

It was why Yaakov Avinu married Leah before he married Rachel. The issue comes up again and again, yet people have only vague ideas of when it is OK for a younger sibling to marry first and when it is not. Some people wonder about the source of the practice. Others aren't sure whom it applies to.

Since it is the season to be asking four questions, we have four questions about a younger sibling waiting for an older sibling to get married first:

Is it a halachah—or is it just a nice thing to do?

What is the source of this halachah or practice?

To whom, exactly, does this concept apply?

Are there any exceptions to the rule?

Is It Halachah?

There are numerous poskim who state that the entire concept of waiting for a sibling is not an actual halachah, but rather a matter of *derech eretz*, or appropriate ethical behavior. The Chasam Sofer (Vol. VII #23) rules in this manner. Yet we also find poskim that understand this concept as an actual halachah, and this is the indication of the TaZ (Y.D. 208:1).

The Source

The Rashbam (Bava Basra 120a) understands the following pasuk as the source of this practice: "It shall not be done thus in our place, to give the younger one [in marriage] before the older" (Bereishis 29:26).

There is a second possible source as well, regarding the daughters of Tzafchad in Bamidbar 27. Machlah, Noah, Choglah, Milkah, and Tirzah either got married in age order or in order of wisdom. According to the commentaries that understand it as age order, this is a source for our concept.

A third source may be from Rabbeinu Tam's understanding of the Gemara in Kiddushin (52b). He writes that when a person says, "Your daughter is engaged to me" to a person who has two daughters, the marriage is effective and the intent is that it should be the eldest daughter, on account of the pasuk in Bereishis 29:26.

Rav Moshe Feinstein's Approach

Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt'l (Igros Moshe Even HaEzer Vol. II #1) has a unique approach to the concept discussed. He writes that, regarding brothers, there is an issue only if each of the brothers has someone available to marry. Under such circumstances, the elder one is to be married first. However, when a younger brother has someone available and the older sibling does not, then this issue does not arise at all, and the younger one is permitted lechatchilah to marry first.

Rav Feinstein then states that in regard to two sisters, it is not a halachah, but just a minhag. A member of this author's family, in fact, had consulted Rav Feinstein on a case of two sisters, and his response was rather lenient. The Maharash Engel (Vol. VI #102) agrees with the position espoused by Rav Moshe, zt'l. Nonetheless, the vast majority of Acharonim do not understand the concept in the manner that Rav Moshe does. The issue seems to revolve around how to read the words of the Shach (Y.D. 244:13).

To Whom Does It Apply?

The idea applies both to older brothers of brothers and older sisters of sisters. It is interesting to note that it applies only to the members of the family. In other words, it is perfectly permitted for a suitor to date the younger sibling. Any restriction applies only to the younger sibling himself or herself, but not to the would-be spouse.

Regarding the older sister of a younger brother, there appears to be a debate among the poskim. The Bach (Y.D. 244) seems to forbid it, while the Maharsham is lenient. The Chelkas Yaakov (Vol. I #125 cited by HaNesuiim K'hilchasam) states that the custom is to be stringent.

Regarding the older brother of a younger sister, there also appears to be a debate. The Igros Sofrim (#29 citing the Chasam Sofer) is stringent. However, the Chazon Ish and the Steipler Gaon (Orchos Rabbeinu Vol. page 281) were both lenient in such a case.

What about twins? Does the twin who is slightly older need to get married first? The Shulchan HaEzer Vol. I 45:3 states that the issue remains a question.

The Exceptions

There are some nine exceptions to the rule.

1. When the siblings do not live in the same country. We need to explore the parameters of this, however. Some poskim apply this leniency even further, stating that it applies to siblings not residing under the same roof.
2. When the older one agrees to it, Rav Moshe Shternbuch (Vol. I #739) permits it. However, if the older sibling is pained by it, then it is not permitted.
3. The Maharsham (Vol. III #136) writes that when the daughter has reached a mature age, the age of 22, it is permitted.
4. If the older sibling is not following in the path of the Torah, it is also permitted, according to the Einayim L'Mishpat, Kiddushin 52a, as cited in HaNesuiim K'hilchasam 1:54.
5. The aforementioned Maharsham allows it when the younger one went ahead and started dating.
6. When the older sibling chooses not to marry. The aforementioned Maharsham calls this leniency "b'shaas ha'dchak."
7. When the older sibling has an illness which makes it difficult for him or her to find a shidduch, this is also termed b'shaas ha'dchak, and the Maharsham permits the younger sibling to date.
8. When the parents are not paying for the wedding at all and it is done by the children, the Beis Yechezkel (siman 60) is lenient.
9. Some poskim are lenient whenever there is somewhat of a need, tzorech k'tzas (Maharash Engel Vol. VI #102; Minchas Elazar Vol. I #163). What does this refer to? It seems that these poskim hold that if there is any need beyond the regular desire to get married, it would be permitted. It should be noted that the Shulchan HaEzer (Vol. I, siman 47:1) states that regardless of the heterim, it should only be done after consultation with a beis din. Others permit it after consultation with a known gadol and posek.

Conclusions

As in many areas of halachah, we find three important notions here. The first is that there is a wide range of divergent opinions. The second is that we should always have a posek or moreh hora'ah that will guide us as we travel down the path of life. The third conclusion is, as in much of halachah, that there are moral and ethical considerations in every decision and path that we embark on. The goal is to do things in a manner that does not hurt people. v The author can be reached at Yairhoffman2@gmail.com.

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Parsha Potpourri

Rabbi Ozer Alport

Home » Weekly Torah Portion » Advanced » Parsha Potpourri
FacebookTwitterEmailMore Shmini(Leviticus 9-11) Aharon's Silence The tremendous joy of the inauguration of the Mishkan was marred by the tragic deaths of Aharon's two oldest sons, Nadav and Avihu. The Torah relates that upon learning of their deaths, Aharon remained silent (Leviticus 10:3). On this verse, there is a perplexing Midrash Pliah. From the Torah's emphasis on Aharon's silence, the Midrash understands that there was something which he wished to say but didn't. What complaint was he holding inside? The Midrash answers cryptically that Aharon would have argued based on the verse, Leviticus 12:3, "When a woman gives birth to a male child, the baby should be circumcised on the eighth day." What possible connection could this have to the events of our parsha? Several commentators explain by noting that the Talmud (Niddah 31b) questions why circumcision is performed on the eighth day and not on the seventh day. The Talmud answers that when a woman has a male child, she becomes impure and forbidden to her husband for seven days. If the circumcision was performed on the seventh day, the guests would be rejoicing while the parents, the central figures at the celebration, would still be sad. On the eighth day, the mother has had the opportunity to immerse in a mikvah and become permitted to her husband, allowing them to also enjoy the occasion. Based on the Talmud's reasoning, we may explain that Aharon was the primary participant in the joy of the inauguration of the Tabernacle, in which he served as Kohen Gadol. After seeing the lengths to which the Torah goes to ensure that the parents are able to be happy at their son's circumcision, Aharon was bothered that he lost two of his children on the day which was supposed to be so dear to him. Aharon's argument would have been bolstered by Rashi's comment (Exodus 24:10) that Nadav and Avihu should have been killed at Mount Sinai for irreverently indulging in food and drink while gazing at a prophetic revelation of G-D, but He spared their lives temporarily so as not to mar the joy of the giving of the Torah. Aharon could have easily questioned why he wasn't entitled to enjoy his day like Moshe at Mount Sinai and the parents at a circumcision, but he remained silent and was rewarded for his unquestioning acceptance of G-D's just ways. * * * SANCTIFIED DEATHS Rashi writes (Leviticus 10:3) that Moshe told Aharon after the death of his two sons, Nadav and Avihu, that he had known that the Mishkan would be sanctified through the death of somebody close to G-D, but he had assumed that it would be either himself or Aharon, yet he now recognized that Nadav and Avihu were even greater than them. How is it possible that Nadav and Avihu were greater than Moshe, who was the greatest prophet ever to live, and Aharon, who was equal in greatness to Moshe (Rashi Shemos 6:26)? Dayan Yisroel Yaakov Fischer answers that there are two types of righteous individuals: those who perfect themselves, and those who also perfect others. Although spending one's time and energy focusing on others comes at the expense of being able to work on one's own self-growth, the Chovos HaLevavos writes that a person who benefits the masses is on a higher overall spiritual level than somebody who singularly focuses on himself. Even though the latter may in fact attain greater personal perfection than the former, the accrued merits of those whom the former

inspires to grow place him on a higher composite level. Moshe assumed that G-D would choose to sanctify the Mishkan through the deaths of either Aharon or himself, as they were the two greatest spiritual influences on the Jewish people in their generation, but G-D elected to take Nadav and Avihu, who because they weren't as busy dealing with others were actually able to reach higher personal levels of perfection than Moshe and Aharon. * * * TWELVE HEAVENLY FIRES Rabbeinu Bechaye writes that the fire which consumed Nadav and Avihu (Leviticus 10:2) was one of 12 fires which descended from Heaven at various times. Six represented Divine satisfaction and came to indicate the acceptance of offerings, and six exacted punishment as an expression of Divine anger. How many of the 12 can you identify? Rabbeinu Bechaye lists six Heavenly fires which came to accept offerings: the fire which descended to accept the offerings brought during the inauguration of the Tabernacle (Leviticus 9:24), the fire which came to accept Gideon's offerings (Judges 6:21), the fire which came to accept Manoach's offerings (Judges 13:20), the fire which came to accept King David's offerings (1-Chronicles 21:26), the fire which descended to the Holy Temple after Shlomo inaugurated it (2-Chronicles 7:1), and the fire which came to accept Elijah the Prophet's offerings in his dispute against the false prophets (1-Kings 18:38). The six Heavenly fires of punishment were: the fire which killed Nadav and Avihu (Leviticus 10:2), the fire which punished those who complained against Moshe (Numbers 11:1), the fire which killed Korach and his followers (Numbers 16:35), the fire that killed Iyov's sheep and servants (Job 1:16), and the two fires that were brought by Elijah to punish the two captains of 50 and their men (2-Kings 1:9-12).

From: **Rabbi Chanan Morrison** <chanan@ravkooktorah.org> reply-to: ravkook-list+owners@googlegroups.com to: rav-kook-list@googlegroups.com date: Wed, Mar 30, 2016 at 7:47 AM subject:

[**Rav Kook Torah**] Psalm 112: No Fear!
 Psalm 112: No Fear!

The Anxious Student

The Talmud in Berakhot 60a relates the following story: Rabbi Ishmael ben Yossi was once in the market of Jerusalem when he saw one of his students walking behind him. Rabbi Ishmael noticed that the student appeared to be frightened and anxious. "You must be a sinner," he remarked. "As it says, 'The sinners in Zion are afraid' (Isaiah 33:14)."

"But does not Scripture also praise fear?" countered the student. "As it says, 'Fortunate is the person who is always afraid' (Proverbs 28:14)."

Rabbi Ishmael rejected the student's argument. "No, that verse refers to Torah." Regarding Torah study, it is proper to be vigilant, lest we forget what we have learned. This concern ensures that we constantly review our studies.

Why should fear and apprehension be a sign of sin? Why are such feelings only appropriate with regard to Torah study?

Trust in G-D

When teaching about the trait of bitachon, placing one's trust in G-D, the Sages quoted Psalm 112. This chapter describes the righteous individual as one with an unwavering faith in G-D, one whose life is unburdened by fears and worries:

"???????????? ???? ? ?????. ???? ?????. ???? ????-?" "He will not fear evil tidings; his heart is steadfast in trusting G-D." (Psalms 112:7) The Sages explained the first part of the verse - "he will not fear evil tidings" - in two ways. Lack of fear is an expression of genuine trust in G-D. Additionally, it is a reward for one's righteousness.

The famed scholar Hillel lived his life according to this teaching. Once, when returning home from a journey, he heard troubling sounds of uproar coming from the town. Hillel remarked, "I am confident that it is not in my house" (Berakhot 60a).

What is the source of this attitude of confidence and equanimity?

Bitachon is based on the realization that even that which appears to be troublesome should not unduly worry us. We recognize that all events in this world are Divinely ordained. If one's heart is genuinely "steadfast in trusting G-D," there is no place for fear and anxiety. Everything is ultimately from G-D; in the larger scheme, nothing is absolute, unredeemable evil.

The most debilitating aspects of suffering are not physical but psychological. When a person can see the world as it is, yet remain full of trust in G-D, even his hardships are not true afflictions. Such a person is content with his portion, and is able to face life's challenges with composure and grace. But for those who are resentful and embittered, troubles await at every corner. One cannot be composed and content without learning to flow with life and accept its ever-changing vicissitudes.

Fear and Sin

What is the connection between fear and sin?

Fear is the result of a state when the soul is at odds with the outside world. We do not fear that which is normal and expected. One who is unburdened with sins and maintains a healthy connection with society will not suffer from excessive worries and fears.

Those whose lives are beset with conflict and unethical conduct, on the other hand, have strayed from the proper path and lost their standing in society. Due their estranged lifestyle, such individuals suffer from anxiety and apprehension.

Furthermore, those living an ethical life are following the moral dictates of the intellect; while those who abandon the path of reason are subject to the whims of the imagination and its fears.

Never Enough Torah

Why did Rabbi Ishmael teach that there is one sphere of life where anxiety is appropriate - regarding Torah study? Why should we be afraid of losing our Torah knowledge?

There is no reason to fear that we might lose something that we deserve, as long as we act appropriately. But when aspiring to acquire qualities that are beyond our natural level - such as the Torah, which transcends the ordinary human level - there is room for concern. Even those who live their lives with integrity, following the dictates of the intellect without suffering from imagined fears, may be concerned lest they lose this extraordinary gift. Unlike other fears, however, this concern need not disturb our equilibrium. There is an obvious method to neutralize it: dedicated effort to study and review.

Only with regard to Torah study is dissatisfaction a positive trait. This feeling motivates us to work towards greater spiritual perfection - a goal that can never be attained, since there is no end to spiritual growth. As long as we recognize that this sense of discontentment is meant to prevent stagnation and stimulate further growth, this concern will not discourage our spirits. Rather, it helps us overcome any lazy tendencies, ensuring that we are not satisfied with spiritual attainments already acquired. With this awareness, our spirits are filled with joy and resolve, as we continue to grow and succeed in our spiritual endeavors.

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II, pp. 324-325)

from: **Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein** <ravadlerstein@torah.org> to: mchochmah@torah.org date: Thu, Mar 31, 2016 at 7:05 PM subject: **Meshech Chochmah - Parshas Shemini**

Parshas Shemini

Kiddush Hashem 2.0 This is what Hashem had spoken, saying, "I will be sanctified through those close to Me. Before the entire nation I will be honored."

Meshech Chochmah: Does Hashem seek or achieve "honor" through the death of those whom He values as close to Him? Certainly not. It is not so difficult, however, to piece together the state of mind of the nation at the time, and to quickly understand how in fact the long-term honor of Hashem hinged upon His quick punishment of Nadav and Avihu.

Man's ability to relate to Hashem is wondrous – and complex. Where others grasp at straws in finding ways to come closer to Him, He paved a clear path for us to move ourselves forward towards Him, through the system of the mitzvos – a practical program of Divine service. It is a program that is demanding, and fraught with opportunities for failure. In His wisdom and compassion, He accounted for human frailty by allowing for repentance, and by dealing with us with more rachamim than din.

Early in their history as a nation, Klal Yisrael experienced spiritual defeat. The sin of the golden calf was a major failing. Yet, as they arrived at this point in time, the eighth day of the consecration of the mishkan, they could look back in recent time and note triumph built upon the devastation wrought by their transgression. Moshe had interceded on their behalf in the aftermath of the egel. They had enthusiastically put together the materials for the mishkan, and saw the project through to completion. The Clouds of Glory, which had departed after the chet ha-egel, had returned. The Shechinah itself had taken up residence in their midst, showing itself in a fire that descended from Heaven. They had established a system of kohanim and levi'im to take charge on behalf of the nation of an order of mishkan-service that would keep the Divine presence in their midst.

This is wonderful and inspiring for us to behold, but people easily could have reached a dangerous conclusion. They might conclude that HKBH is not particularly zealous about adherence to His demands; that He would routinely look the other way upon human sin and failings. Just think about how deeply Klal Yisroel had disappointed Him – and how easily He was appeased!

Had people come to this conclusion, consciously or otherwise, the entire human enterprise would have been put in danger. We are indeed vouchsafed Hashem's rachamim, but there is also Divine justice. Hashem meticulously weighs when to show forbearance and compassion, and when to show that what He asks of us is not arbitrary. Sin is toxic, and it leaves consequences. If sin becomes in the human mind just a small bump in the road rather than a monstrous problem, people will not and cannot progress the way He intended them to.

The deaths of Nadav and Avihu demonstrated the other side of the coin – Divine seriousness about chet, and Hashem's strictness in managing it. On the day of great joy at the inauguration of the mishkan, Nadav and Avihu were nonetheless cut down by Hashem for deviating ever so slightly from what they had been commanded. The impact upon the people was enormous. The incident served as an effective counterforce to the impression that they did not have to be so exacting about listening to His instructions.

Aharon understood this. In fact, this realization allowed him to bear his personal tragedy in silence. He comprehended just how important the lesson of the deaths of his sons would be on the future of the entire people. He also understood that he was not to bear the tragedy in solitude. Nadav and Avihu needed to provide an object lesson to the people only because that people had failed so miserably with the chet ha-egel. Had they not built the egel, nothing in the next months of their journey would have suggested to them that Divine justice was more relaxed than it is. Aharon understood that the chet ha-egel necessitated the death of his two sons, and it was therefore a matter of national responsibility to mourn for them, not his personal pain to be borne alone. For this reason the word went out, "And your brothers – all of Bnei Yisrael – will mourn the destruction that Hashem destroyed." Building on the pasuk "A good name is better than good oil,"[2] a midrash[3] compares Chananya, Mishael and Azaryah favorably to Nadav and Avihu. The Kiddush Hashem brought about by Daniel's three friends who willingly faced the fires of Nevuchadnetzar's furnace, Chazal tell us, was greater than that generated by Nadav and Avihu, who had recently been sanctified through the good anointing oil. Nevuchadnetzar reacted with genuine humility, reverence and awe at the sight of Chananya, Mishael and Azaryah emerging alive and unscathed from the raging fires of the furnace. Chazal teach[4] that he was brought to such ecstasy regarding Hashem and His power, that had it not been for the intervention of an angel,

Nevuchadnetzar would have composed songs of praise to Hashem that would have put Dovid's Tehillim to shame! (The malach was that of human lust – the same one the Chazal see as overcoming Yehudah when he chanced upon Tamar on the road. [5] His inclination was to avoid her, by crossing to the other side, until the angel of taavah ignited in him an unusually strong attraction. In the case of Nevuchadnetzar, some form of taavah quickly distracted him, marring the supernal spirituality of the moment, and ensuring that he could not distill the experience into words of everlasting worth beyond his original reaction.)

The difference between the two incidents follows from our discussion above. The deaths of Nadav and Avihu served as a corrective to a misimpression about Divine justice. The harsh punishment of two spiritual giants termed "close" by Hashem restored a sense of proper fear of punishment to the people. But a more important form of yir'ah is yir'as ha-Romemus, reverence for Hashem's greatness. That yir'ah was communicated by Chananya, Mishael and Azaryah at the furnace.

We can appreciate the superiority of Chananya, Mishael and Azaryah's sanctification of Hashem by way of a mashal. Both a mother and a wet-nurse eat, and provide nutrients to the baby they sustain. The wet-nurse, conscious of her service to the baby, nonetheless enjoys her food. She will, at times, eat things that are not particularly helpful to the baby if they appeal to her, and avoid foods that are beneficial to the baby if they do not appeal. The mother, on the other hand, eats selflessly, seeing herself as a mere conduit of benefit to the beloved child.

At the giving of the Torah, Nadav and Avihu were among the privileged few to ascend upon the mountain itself, while the people waited below. The Torah tells us[6] that "they beheld G-d, and ate and drank." The Targum renders this "they rejoiced as if they ate or drank." In other words, they found personal enjoyment in being treated to a clearer understanding of Hashem's nature for the purpose of sharing that experience with the rest of the people. They acted like the wet-nurse, happy to sustain the child she nurtures, but leaving room for her own needs. Had Nadav and Avihu seen themselves simply as conduits of information from Hashem to the people, they would not have personalized the experience. There would have been no room for their own egos in a selfless experience, akin to the role of the mother nursing the child.

For people of their stature, this was a fatal flaw. They should have been punished on the spot, Chazal tell us,[7] but Hashem did not want to mar the occasion of matan Torah. He waited till the inauguration of the mishkan to mete out His punishment. They died, albeit in a manner that taught a lesson about His strictness concerning observance of the Law.

Their death proved to be a massive kiddush Hashem. It strongly contrasts with that of Chananya, Mishael and Azaryah, and why Chazal saw theirs as superior. Daniel's three friends provided the Kiddush Hashem and remained alive! Their self-sacrifice was fuller than that of Nadav and Avihu. They could have avoided the confrontation with the idolaters by fleeing in advance.[8] They consciously chose to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the community, to inspire the community to tenaciously cling to their beliefs. They acted like the mother, not like the wet-nurse.

By leaving room for their own selves and needs at Har Sinai, apart from the needs of the tzibbur, Nadav and Avihu's Kiddush Hashem demanded that they continue to stay apart from the community. They died. Chananya, Mishael and Azaryah, however, determined to make themselves part of the tzibbur when their personal concerns would have led them to abstract themselves from the community. Because they chose to align themselves with the tzibbur, risking their lives to do so, their Kiddush Hashem allowed them to emerge alive and rejoin the people.

[1] Based on Meshech Chochmah, Vayikra 10:3 [2] Koheles 7:1 [3] Shemos Rabbah 48:1 [4] Sanhedrin 92B [5] Bereishis 40:16 [6] Shemos 24:11 [7] Vayikra Rabbah 20:10 [8] Tosafos Pesachim 53B s.v. mah ra'u To Support Project Genesis- Torah.org Questions or comments? Email feedback@torah.org. Join the Jewish Learning Revolution! Torah.org: The Judaism Site brings this and a host of other classes to you every week. Visit <http://torah.org> or email learn@torah.org to get your own free copy of this

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From: Torah Musings <newsletter@torahmusings.com> reply-to: Torah Musings <newsletter@torahmusings.com>
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Preventing Alzheimer's By Learning Gemara
Amanda Bradley

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It is estimated that 1 in 8 Americans over the age of 65 develop some form of dementia. There is still no cure. However, while doctors have not yet succeeded in preventing dementia, it is possible to delay the onset for up to a number of years by adopting a combination of lifestyle changes: eating a healthy, Mediterranean-type diet, taking regular exercise, and undertaking activities that stretch the brain.

Why 'Brain-Training' Works:

New research into brain plasticity has revealed that when we force our brains to master new ideas, learn a new language, or understand a new concept, we create new connections in the brain which can then be used to create other thought-patterns and expand our mental possibilities. Creating new active brain connections can counteract the effect of having lost connections through the build-up of the amyloid protein which is thought to be a cause of Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia.

There are many different activities which create these new brain connections. Going dancing, playing bridge, doing the crossword, learning a new language, and playing online brain training games have all been highlighted as good for the brain.

But Jewish seniors have another option. Learning Talmud (made up of the Gemara and the Mishna, and often used as a term interchangeably with 'gemara') can play an equally effective role in preventing Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia in Jewish baby boomers. According to Dr Ben Keene, MRCPsych, Consultant Psychiatrist in London, UK, "The regular study of gemara in a pair or group provides both social interaction and cognitive exercise. There is evidence that both regular cognitive activity and social engagement are neuro-protective."

It is now well-known that South Korea encourages their children to learn Talmud in order to sharpen their brains. Their logic, that since Jews are smart, and Jews learn Talmud, therefore learning Talmud will make South Koreans smart too, is still untested. However, if they keep it up into old age, South Korea will probably be very successful at reducing dementia.

4 Ways That Learning Gemara Is Good For Brain Health In Jewish Seniors:

1. Sustaining Mental Effort: The gemara is written as a combination of shorthand and a stream-of-consciousness work, with millions of different, inter-connecting pieces of information encoded within it. Hundreds of commentaries and other Jewish works branch off of the gemara, with references and ideas interwoven within them. To understand gemara requires conscious, sustained mental effort, which is proven to increase brain connections and lower harmful amyloid depositions.

2. Learning a New Language: To learn the gemara/Talmud, one needs to master a new language – Aramaic – and hold it in mind, which is challenging even for Jewish seniors who are well-versed in classical Hebrew. Learning a new language has been shown to be extremely beneficial for preventing cognitive decline.

3. Creating New Neural Pathways: Jewish baby boomers who learn gemara also need to remember several contradictory strands of debate, which

exercises both the memory and the brain's ability to consider two things in relation to each other. The logic and reason that is required to keep track of the (usually unstated) arguments force the brain to create new neural pathways and boost one's powers of analysis.

4. Boosting Expressiveness & Speed of Thought: The powerful impact that learning Talmud has on pushing off the onset of dementia and sharpening the brain is enhanced by the fact that it is traditionally learned in chavrusa. In chavrusa learning, two people discuss, dissect, debate and really argue with each other in the course of coming to understand the meaning of a text. In the course of chavrusa learning, one's flexibility of argument is increased as one responds to the other's suggestions. Having to listen to the other person's theories, and explain one's own, stretch the fluency of expression and speed of thought.

So, before you turn to Su Dokus, online brain training games, or the crossword, think about starting – or re-establishing – a chavrusa in gemara. It might just change your mind entirely.