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<https://yated.com/krias-yam-suf-the-day-we-discovered-ourselves/>

Krias Yam Suf: The Day We Discovered Ourselves **Rav Yaakov Feitman**

March 27, 2026

The culmination of Pesach and indeed Yetzias Mitzrayim was Krias Yam Suf. This was clearly one of the greatest miracles in human history and has become a part of our legacy, davening and emunah. But something equally important happened then that also has a daily impact upon our lives and the hashkafah by which we live.

My rebbi, Rav Yitzchok Hutner (Maamarei Pachad Yitzchok, 69:9, page 249), notes that the Shirah is the first time that Knesses Yisroel speaks of itself in the first person. The words are "zeh Keili ve'anveihu — This is my G-d and I will build Him a sanctuary; the G-d of my father and I will exalt Him" (Shemos 15:2). This is the first moment of Klal Yisroel's self-awareness. When a child is born, it has no such awareness of a self. At this crucial moment, Klal Yisroel declares coronation of the Ribono Shel Olam, for without that, it cannot continue to exist.

So now we know. Beyond the exodus, beyond Mattan Torah, it seems that we received our identity as a nation at Krias Yam Suf. Why, indeed, not when, as the Haggadah tells us, "We became a nation there [in Egypt]"? Why not at Har Sinai, when we were told what to do and what to avoid? We are the nation of the Torah. Shouldn't that be the moment when we discovered our identity?

Rav Hutner answers that all other nissim were temporary. They lasted as long as they were needed, and then the world returned to its original state of creation, which is the ostensibly natural not supernatural world. However, when Hashem split the Yam Suf, the waters would have remained suspended in midair if not for His declaration that "the water will go back upon Egypt, upon its chariots and upon its horseman" (Shemos 14:26). As Rav Hutner expressed it elsewhere (ibid. 33:15, page 135), "If when we went down to Mitzrayim, the future family of Klal Yisroel that would go toward the End of Days was created, its form and final birth happened at Krias Yam Suf." But we have not yet fully understood why this was the pivotal moment when we realized who we were, why we were created, and what our purpose is in the world. Rav Hutner gives a comprehensive and profound answer, which is beyond the scope of this article, but I would like to suggest a simpler approach to this important query, which is actually based upon Rav Hutner's words elsewhere.

First of all, Rav Hutner (Pachad Yitzchok, Pesach 40:7) quotes the Mechilta (Shemos 14:21) that all the waters in the world split at the same time as the Yam Suf. He explains that this seemingly unnecessary part of the miracle "happened because, in fact, the neis of Krias Yam Suf affected the entire realm of water and earth." In other words, this miracle was not limited to the nation's need to be rescued from the Egyptians. It represented a new manifestation of Hashem's power and control over every facet of the universe. This itself is an answer to Rav Hutner's question earlier. Once we understand that the world was created for Klal Yisroel, the final part of Yetzias Mitzrayim must be felt all over the earth so that we would realize that from this point on, "everything is because of Klal Yisroel" (see Vayikra Rabbah 36:4).

To continue our study of the Pachad Yitzchok's view of Krias Yam Suf, Rav Hutner (Maamarei Pachad Yitzchok, Pesach 96:2, page 344) quotes the Yerushalmi (Arvei Pesachim, halacha 6) that "the reason that Klal Yisroel didn't sing shirah until the seventh day of Pesach is that the culmination of geulah (redemption) did not occur until then. He elaborates on this statement of Chazal in several maamirim (ibid. 33:15, 41:6), where he derives the relationship between the finality of geulah and shirah from a posuk in Tehillim (13:6), which we recite every day at the end of Hodu. Dovid Hamelech says, "But as for me, I trust in your kindness; my heart will exult in your salvation. I will sing to Hashem, for He has dealt kindly with me." Rav Hutner concludes, following the Vilna Gaon (commentary in the siddur on Hodu), that even if one totally believes in Hashem and has absolute bitachon that He will rescue us, shirah is not recited or sung until the redemption has actually taken place. This is also quoted by the Emek Brocha, who heard it from the Brisker Rov in the name of his father, Rav Chaim Soloveitchik (see also Rav Nissan Kaplan, Shalmei Nissan, Brachos, page 185:18).

We can conclude from the Vilna Gaon, Rav Chaim and now Rav Hutner that Klal Yisroel was able to burst into a song that has become eternal because they had experienced the miraculous completion of the process of Yetzias Mitzrayim. Only after witnessing the "Egyptians dead on the seashore" were they able to collectively and individually sing our beloved Az Yoshir. We can now understand why we discovered our identity and voice at Krias Yam Suf. As we learned from Rav Chaim Brisker, even when one has total trust in Hashem, it is impossible to sing shirah on an incomplete event. In the case of Yetzias Mitzrayim, this was the complete annihilation of the Egyptian army. Perhaps there are analogies to the current war in Iran. We cannot be sure, but we can hope that the Yad Hashem will once again become manifest and clear enough for us to sing. This, as Rav Hutner suggests, might also be the reason why the waters would have remained standing if not for an express command from Hashem. Since this was a pivotal final moment releasing us from the threat of Mitzrayim, the miracle had to include a sense of culmination and permanence. This also explains the universal aspect of Krias Yam Suf being both visible and effective throughout the world.

Many other aspects of Krias Yam Suf now fall into place as well. The Mateh Moshe (Hilchos Pesach) quotes Rabbeinu Bachya (Parshas Va'eira), who says that Krias Yam Suf is included in the four aspects of geulah. In fact, the splitting of the sea corresponds to the kos shel brocha of Birkas Hamazon. Halachically, there is a fascinating disagreement amongst the poskim (Hilchos Krias Shma) if one can fulfill his obligation to mention Yetzias Mitzrayim by reciting the Shirah. The Mogein Avrohom is certain that one can, but Rav Akiva Eiger citing his son-in-law, the Chasam Sofer, is unsure (see Brachos 13b). In any case, it is clear that Yetzias Mitzrayim was officially over after the Shirah. This might also explain why it marks the culmination of Pesukei Dezimra, the passages that praise Hashem for many things. It also explains why the Mishnah Berurah (51) assures us that "one should recite the Shirah joyously and imagine that he, too, has crossed the sea that day. Whoever follows this regimen will surely have his sins forgiven."

Finally, the Maharal (Gevuros Hashem, chapter 39) tells us that "when Klal Yisroel accepted the royalty of Hashem at Krias Yam Suf, we gained our new form through the singing of the Shirah. The Vilna Gaon (Aderes Eliyahu to Devorim 33:8), too, teaches that "at Krias Yam Suf, we acquired the ability to serve Hashem properly (nishlam kinyan avodah)." Thus, we see that Krias Yam Suf, on many levels, represents the ultimate perfection of the Jewish body and soul so that we can truly be avdei and ovdei Hashem. Just to complete the picture, let us note that the Shelah Hakadosh and Meshech Chochmah (both on Parshas Beshalach) stress the culmination aspect of Krias Yam Suf and the Shirah. They both understand those magical moments at the end of Yetzias Mitzrayim as a time of self-discovery. We know that the Ramchal (Derech Hashem) stresses that each Yom Tov brings a renewal and ability to reenact what happened on that day. The seventh day of Pesach is therefore a unique time to look deeply inside of ourselves and discover new paths to greatness and how we can help bring the geulah. May Hashem accept our efforts and bring the long-awaited and much-needed geulah sheleimah bemeheirah veyomeinu. Amein. A chag kosher vesomeiach to all.

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The Great Supermarket Controversy: Testing the Limits of Mechirat Chametz by Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

In a previous post, the practice of "mechirat chametz" (the sale of leavened products to a non-Jew before Passover) was explored and defended. The argument rested on an understanding of the Torah's intent behind the prohibition of owning chametz: since the Torah's primary concern is that chametz not be eaten, the requirement to remove it from one's possession functions as a safeguard against the risk of consuming it absentmindedly. On this basis, the Jewish people have embraced "mechirat chametz" as a declaration that there is another force equally capable of keeping one away from the chametz: the prohibition of theft. The individual homeowner who sells his chametz, and then scrupulously avoids touching it throughout Passover because it legally belongs to another, is giving powerful expression to the integrity of monetary relationships.

The question that arises, then, is what happens when the seller has no intention whatsoever of leaving the chametz alone. The individual homeowner's sale, whatever questions it generates, is within the lines of halachic legitimacy. A far more contested case is the sale of inventory of stores (supermarkets, liquor stores, grocery chains) that continue to operate throughout Passover, selling chametz to all comers. The debate this practice has generated is contentious, and goes to the heart of what "mechirat chametz" is really about and what the halachic system is willing to tolerate in the name of minimizing transgression.

The difficulties with such a sale are significant, and they operate on multiple levels simultaneously. A store owner who sells his inventory to a non-Jew before Passover, and then opens his doors on Passover morning and sells chametz to every customer who walks in, is doing something that looks

nothing like a valid sale. The "ha'aramah" objection to "mechirat chametz" in general (the term refers, alternatively, to halachic evasion or to a legal sham) would seem to apply here with particular force. There is no pretense of actually separating from the chametz. The chametz never leaves the premises. The owner handles it, prices it, stocks it, and profits from it throughout the holiday.

A second, and more than merely technical, problem sits alongside the first. Assuming for a moment that the pre-Passover sale was valid, that ownership genuinely transferred to the non-Jewish purchaser, in that case, the store owner who continues to do business with the chametz is not merely evading the spirit of the law. He is committing "gezel," theft, against the person who now legally owns the merchandise. The very rationale offered in defense of individual "mechirat chametz," that the prohibition of theft is what keeps the Jew away from the chametz, is here inverted: the sale, if real, creates a prohibition of theft, and the store owner is violating it openly with every transaction.

The two objections thus mirror the two poles of the broader "ha'aramah" debate: on one hand, the sale is a sham, wholly outside the spirit of the law; on the other hand, if it is not a sham, the owner's conduct is an active violation of ownership rights. Either way, the situation is deeply problematic. (It should be noted that the objection to "mechirat chametz" generally assumes authorities have disqualified the "mechirat chametz" even of any individual whose general behavior indicates he does not personally respect the relevant religious principles. However, the situation of the merchant is more extreme, both because of the public nature of the non-observance and because the commerce specifically undermines the claim of having sold the chametz to another.)

Given these objections, it is no surprise that a significant number of major authorities completely rejected the validity of such sales, ruling not merely that they were inappropriate but that they were null and void, leaving the chametz fully prohibited. Among those taking this position were the "Sdei Chemed," "Chachametz U'Matzah," "Responsa Maharam Shik," "Tuvia Goldstein," "Emek Halachah," "Responsa Y. Yishai," "Responsa Shev'eisi Eish," and R. Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, as quoted in R. Eliyahu Shlesinger's "Mo'adei Kodesh." Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik was also among those who completely disapproved of such sales.

The stringent position offered its own counter-argument to the lenient technical claims that have been presented. The standard defense of "mechirat chametz" in these circumstances holds that a seller's insincerity, even when established by later actions, cannot retroactively cancel the rights of a buyer. The stringent authorities responded that when the insincerity is blatant and evident to the entire world, as it is when a store has been publicly open on Passover for years running, this is categorically different. The situation parallels the case of "Matnat Beit Choron" discussed in the Talmud, a man had taken a vow prohibiting himself from deriving benefit from his son. When the son wished to make a wedding for his own son, he sought a maneuver that would allow his father to attend the wedding. To circumvent the vow, the son transferred his property to a friend, with the transparent understanding that the transfer had no real-world effect and existed only to allow the father to make use of it for the wedding. The Talmud rules that such a transfer is treated as null, because the subsequent behavior of the parties makes the original insincerity manifest. Here too, where a store's doors remain open on Passover morning just as they do every other day of the year, the owner's earlier "sale" is similarly exposed as having never reflected genuine intent.

R. Moshe Sternbuch combined both objections, invalidating the sale because of the continuing commerce and additionally noting that since there is no valid "bitul" (nullification) of the chametz, the sale falls short even of the standard defended by the "Bechor Shor" regarding ordinary "mechirat chametz."

"Responsa Pri Hasadeh" inverted the logic of the "Chatam Sofer," who had argued that the main consideration validating "mechirat chametz" is the removal of the Jew from engagement with the chametz, noting that in this

case the Jew is openly conducting business with the chametz, thus eliminating the very foundation of the sale's legitimacy. Notably, even the "Sdei Chemed," despite his stringent ruling, did not follow his position to its full logical conclusion of declaring the chametz completely forbidden in all benefit after Passover. Rather, he limited the prohibition to selling to other Jews, explaining that while the more stringent position would be more logical, it is less likely to be observed, and he therefore opted for the lesser evil.

Notwithstanding these formidable objections, there were significant authorities who found at least some basis for the validity of such sales. In many respects, the question is not fundamentally different from that of allowing any non-observant Jew to participate in the communal "mechirat chametz," a person who may not take the sale seriously and may in fact continue to consume his own chametz during Passover. The arguments in both directions tend to travel together.

The most widely cited responsum on this question was authored by R. Chaim Halberstam of Sanz, known as the "Divrei Chaim." He addressed the scenario of a completely non-observant Jew who regularly sold his chametz before Passover but was known to consume it over the holiday. The Divrei Chaim suggested that although the seller's behavior casts doubt on his sincerity, it does not necessarily invalidate the sale. The buyer acquires legal ownership, and the seller's subsequent actions do not retroactively undo the transaction.

Later authorities connected this reasoning to a Talmudic principle explained by Maimonides, that a bill of divorce can under certain circumstances be coerced from a recalcitrant husband, despite the formal requirement of his consent, on the grounds that his inner will is to comply with divine law. The view here suggests that even where a person's behavior appears inconsistent, his deeper will may align with halachic compliance, and the formal transaction can therefore be valid.

Even among those who found some validity in such sales, the range of positions was wide, reflecting different calibrations of the "ha'aramah" debate. Some maintained that the sale is completely valid and morally acceptable; others held that it is technically valid but outside the spirit of the law; still others argued that while the sale may be technically effective, the store owner is nevertheless committing theft by continuing to sell merchandise that no longer belongs to him.

What emerges from this spectrum is that even the lenient authorities do not view the store owner's situation as remotely ideal. The disagreement is not over whether the arrangement is praiseworthy but over whether it has any legal standing at all, and whether the net communal benefit of partial compliance outweighs the costs of legitimizing a deeply compromised practice.

This is where the question of communal rabbinic responsibility enters. A passionate advocate for the lenient position was R. Yaakov Breisch of Zurich, who argued not only that such sales were permissible but that facilitating them was an obligation of the rabbinate, in order to minimize sin whenever possible. Others, including the Lubavitcher Rebbe, emphasized that while such sales may have technical validity, stores ideally should not operate on Passover at all.

R. Moshe Feinstein, despite his confidence in the technical validity of the sale, similarly acknowledged that a local rabbinic authority may decide that such sales are not advisable and should act according to his conscience. The question of what is best for the community is separate from the question of what is technically permissible.

After Passover, the consumer faces a different question: may one purchase chametz from such a store? Here too, opinions vary. Some maintain that there is no reason whatsoever for the customer to refrain from purchasing, while others, including the Vilna Gaon, forbade the purchase of any chametz that had been subject to such an arrangement.

A final extension of the issue concerns scenarios where chametz is sold on behalf of individuals without their explicit participation, or even against their wishes. While some authorities were willing to extend leniencies to such

cases, others viewed them as deeply problematic, raising questions about consent, agency, and the very nature of the transaction.

The debate over supermarket chametz sales is, in many ways, the crucible in which the broader tensions of "ha'aramah" are most sharply revealed. The collective effort to balance the integrity of the law, religious sincerity, and genuine concern for the spiritual and practical challenges of the Jewish people continues to play out in the exchanges of the ongoing halachic debate. There are no easy answers here, only the enduring question of how far the law can be adapted in the name of minimizing transgression, and at what point the adaptation itself becomes the problem. It takes wisdom, sincerity, and spiritual and interpersonal responsibility to know the difference.

<https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-vayikra/parashat-shemini/bameh-chatu-nadav-veavihu>

Sichot Rashei HaYeshiva 5785

Shemini | **What Was the Sin of Nadav and Avihu?**

Harav Yaakov Medan

29.03.2019

Summarized by Nadav Schultz. Translated by David Strauss; Edited by Sarah Rudolph

The Torah's sparse account of Aharon's sons Nadav and Avihu left Chazal plenty of room to discuss the nature of their sin, and at least fourteen different explanations have been offered. We will try to classify these explanations, through a broad overview, into three main groups.

The first set of explanations assumes the sin of Nadav and Avihu stemmed from improper entry, without the proper seriousness, into the sanctuary.

Among the explanations in this group are the views that they entered while intoxicated or unkempt, or without the requisite priestly garments.

The second group assumes the sin of the sons of Aharon lay in their desire to replace the previous generation of leadership – Moshe and Aharon. An example of this idea is found in a midrash that says they sinned by "ruling on a halachic issue in the presence of their teacher." [1] Another opinion in this group explains:

Moshe and Aharon were walking ahead, and Nadav and Avihu were walking behind them, and all of Israel were after them, and [Nadav and Avihu] said: "When will these two old men die, so that we shall wield authority over the community in their stead?" (Vayikra Rabba, Acharei Mot 10)

The third group of explanations for the sin may be familiar from Rashi's commentary on the book of Devarim:

"To destroy him" – this denotes the extermination of ones' children, as it is stated: "And I destroyed his fruit [offspring] from above" (Amos 2:9). "And I prayed also for Aharon" – and my prayer availed to atone half, so that only two of his sons died, and two remained alive. (Rashi, Devarim 9:20)

According to this understanding, the sin of Nadav and Avihu is linked to an earlier sin, for which their father was the one who held primary responsibility – the sin of the golden calf.

I will propose another explanation, which is based on the third approach mentioned above but weaves together all three groups.

The day of the dedication of the Mishkan, described in our parasha, is strongly linked to the sin of the golden calf. The parasha opens with a command directed toward Aharon:

And he said to Aharon: Take for yourself a calf of the herd for a sin-offering, and a ram for a burnt-offering, both without blemish, and offer them before the Lord. (Vayikra 9:2)

Aharon is commanded to offer a calf as a sin-offering, a sacrifice which is not found anywhere else in the Torah. The Midrash, echoed by Rashi, noted the puzzling nature of this offering:

"Take for yourself a calf" – this informs us that the Holy One, blessed be He, atoned for him by way of this calf for the calf that he had fashioned. (Rashi, Vayikra 9:2)

Thus, the eighth day was not only the day of the dedication of the Mishkan, but was also a day of atonement for Aharon and the nation for the sin of the

golden calf. A few verses later, the Torah describes the ensuing events as follows:

And Aharon lifted up his hands toward the people, and blessed them; and he came down from offering the sin-offering and the burnt-offering and the peace-offerings. And Moshe and Aharon went into the Tent of Meeting, and they came out and blessed the people; and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. (Vayikra 9:22-23)

Aharon concluded the sacrifice of the offerings and blessed the people – presumably with the Priestly Blessing. But then Moshe and Aharon entered the Tent of Meeting, after which they blessed the people together – and only after this second blessing did the Shekhina appear to the people. Rashi cites a midrash that addresses the double blessing of Aharon, and why he needed to enter the Tent of Meeting with Moshe:

"And they came out and blessed the people" – They said [the words at the end of Tehillim 90, the psalm called a "prayer of Moshe"]: "May the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us" (Tehillim 90:17) – i.e., may it be God's will that the Shekhina rest upon the work of your hands – because during all seven days of the dedication, when Moshe was setting up the Mishkan and ministering in it and dismantling it daily, the Shekhina did not rest in it, and the Israelites felt ashamed, saying to Moshe: "O, our teacher Moshe! All our efforts were only [so] that the Shekhina would dwell among us and we would know that the sin of the golden calf was atoned for us!" (Rashi, ad loc.)

The nation was in a state of high tension: had atonement been achieved for the sin of the golden calf, or not? For seven days, Moshe ministered in the Mishkan, and at the end of each day, the Mishkan was dismantled without the Shekhina having rested upon it. The pressure in the nation was mounting, and the fear arose that God had not forgiven them for the sin of the golden calf. But then Moshe and Aharon entered the Tent of Meeting and came out to bless the people, at which point the glory of the Lord appeared to the people and a fire came from heaven to consume the offering. The people's fear subsided, as they now knew that God had forgiven them for the sin of the calf.

However, it is possible to imagine another way of dealing with the unbearable anxiety and tension, which perhaps was chosen by Nadav and Avihu. Instead of doing nothing and tensely waiting for the revelation of the Shekhina and atonement for the sin of the golden calf, the sons of Aharon decided to stand up and do something. On the face of it, there is nothing more appropriate than the action that they took. The whole point of the Mishkan is that human efforts should bring about the resting of the Shekhina, especially with regard to the continual fire on the altar – concerning which the law is that "Even though fire descends from heaven, it is [still] a mitzva to bring from ordinary [fire]." [2] Why, then, were the sons of Aharon punished with death from Heaven; what did they do wrong?

Let us now return to Aharon and Moshe. When fire did not descend from heaven immediately following Aharon's blessing, they too reacted to the difficulty, but in a different way: they entered the Tent of Meeting and prayed to God, based on their understanding that the only thing that the sacrifice lacked at that point was prayer. Instead of taking physical action, they prayed and waited for God to do His will.

In the end, we see that Moshe and Aharon were correct; the proper course of action was not to attempt to "hurry" the revelation, but to wait with patient anticipation, despite the mounting tension.

Another Biblical example of the importance of waiting can be seen in David's war against the Pelishtim:

And the Pelishtim came up yet again, and spread themselves in the valley of Refa'im. And when David inquired of the Lord, He said: "You shall not go up. Make a circuit behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. And it shall be, when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry trees, then you shall take action, for then the Lord will have gone out before you to smite the camp of the Pelishtim. And David did so, as the Lord commanded him, and smote the Pelishtim from Geva until the approach to Gezer. (II Shmuel 5:22-25)

God makes a very difficult demand of David: he must wait with his troops for the opportune moment, which apparently depended on a heavenly sign, and only then attack the Pelishti camp. We can only try to imagine how frightening that wait must have been, with all their instincts screaming to attack the enemy so close at hand. But David withstood the test, and his success brought about a great salvation and the removal of the Pelishti threat from Jerusalem.

We can also point to an earlier case in the reverse – when Shaul was commanded to wait for Shmuel's arrival at Gilgal[3] before engaging in battle with the Pelishtim, but he failed to do so. Shaul's inability to wait for God's word (through the prophet), in the face of tension and anticipation, was one of the leading factors in his being deposed from the kingship. Of course, the sin of the golden calf is the prime example of the problem of hastiness and an inability to wait. There, the Torah describes:

And the people saw that Moshe delayed to come down from the mountain, and the people gathered together against Aharon, and said to him: Rise [and] make us a god who shall go before us; for as for this Moshe, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him. (Shemot 32:1)

Ultimately, the people could not wait, and so they demanded of Aharon that he fashion another god for them – the golden calf. This is the most serious sin in the history of the Jewish people.

And now we can understand the connection between the sin of the sons of Aharon and the sin of the golden calf, as both stemmed from the same root. The ability to wait is not simply a good quality. There are times when a person is tested in his relationship to God: there are moments when a person is powerless to act. In those moments, he must look to his Creator, pray, and wait. The call might seem overwhelming; man's nature is to act in order to influence reality. But at certain moments, God lacks nothing except the very expectation and hope that He will save the person in trouble. At those moments, there is no room for any action, but only for the ability to wait patiently, despite the difficulty, until God acts.

This also connects to the first two sets of explanations of the sin of Nadav and Avihu. First, Nadav and Avihu's desire to inherit the leadership stemmed from their desire for more active leadership. However, God desired Moshe and Aharon, who knew not to be alarmed by the fact that the Shekhina did not descend, but rather to continue praying until God would relent.

The view that they did not enter the sanctuary with the necessary seriousness also fits in with this approach, for the necessity of waiting is bound up with the necessity of being able to prepare oneself. If a person is in a hurry to enter the sanctuary and is not interested in waiting, it is to be expected that he will not prepare himself properly. Consequently, it is to be expected that if he does enter the sanctuary, he will do so without the requisite seriousness. A person must always strive to further Divine goals in the world. But there comes a time when one knows there is nothing more he can do. When that time comes, there is nothing to do but to raise one's eyes to Heaven, offer a prayer, and await salvation. If he is so fortunate as to merit God's favor, then the verse in our parasha will be fulfilled for him too – "And the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people."

[This sicha was delivered by Harav Yaakov Medan on Shabbat Parashat Shemini 5779.]

1. See, e.g., Eiruvim 63a, cited by Rashi on Vayikra 10:2. 2. Eiruvim 63a, and thus ruled the Rambam (Hilkhos Temidin u-Musafin 2:1). 3. I Shmuel 13.

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subject: **Rav Frand - First Times Are Special**

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1376 – Talking While Washing Your Hands for Netilas Yodayim – Is There a Problem? Good Shabbos!
First Times Are Special

This week's parsha contains the tragic incident of the death of Aharon's two sons during the festive Chanukas Habayis of the Mishkan. They were inaugurating the Mishkan that they built over the past six months or so and the Shechina was about to descend. Unfortunately, Nadav and Avihu brought a "foreign fire" (there is a big machlokes as to exactly what they did wrong) and they died on the spot.

The pasuk says that Moshe called Mishael and Elitzafan, the sons of Uziel, to remove the dead bodies from the Mishkan (Vayikra 10:4). In other words, Moshe called on the living cousins of the deceased, rather than then living brothers (Elazar and Isamar), to remove the dead bodies.

A fascinating Daas Zekeinim M'baalei Hatosfos, citing the halachic Medrash Toras Kohanim, derives from here that, in general, kohanim may not come in contact with the dead. Had they been permitted to do so, we would assume that Elazar and Isamar would be the more natural candidates to remove the dead bodies of their brothers, Nadav and Avihu.

The Daas Zekeinim is astonished at this Toras Kohanim "for we see explicitly elsewhere that a kohen is prohibited from coming in contact with the dead" (Vayikra 21:1). Why, they ask, would this indirect incident be cited as a source for a halacha that we learn elsewhere explicitly?

Furthermore, they ask, Elazar and Isamar were regular kohanim. Why, then, could they not make themselves tameh by removing the bodies of their brothers? A kohen hedyot (regular kohen) is permitted to become tameh for a close relative who dies. It is only the Kohen Gadol who cannot become tameh even for a close relative. Why on earth is the Toras Kohanim saying that the reason why the cousins, rather than the brothers, needed to remove the dead bodies was because a kohen cannot do that?

The Daas Zekeinim M'baalei Hatosfos derive from here a fantastic chiddush that on the day that kohanim do the avodah for the first time, even regular kohanim have the status of a Kohen Gadol and are not permitted to become tameh, even from the dead body of a close relative.

This answers both questions: (This was the first day on the job for Elazar and Isamar. Therefore, they had the status of Kohanim Gedolim, who are not permitted to become tameh even for close relatives.) The Toras Kohanim was not referring to the general prohibition against kohanim becoming tameh. Rather, the Toras Kohanim says "from here we see that a kohen hedyot cannot be metameh l'meisim" – despite the fact that we know this from an explicit pasuk (Vayikra 21:1) – because a kohen hedyot cannot be metameh even for a close relative on the day of his inauguration! That is why they were not permitted to remove their brothers!

Rav Asher Dikker, a Rebbe in Lakewood, sent me an interesting vort from Rav Elyashiv, zt"l. Rav Elyashiv wrote that the reason a kohen has the status of a Kohen Gadol on the day he starts his avoda, and therefore cannot even be metameh l'krovim, is because all beginnings must be perfect. Therefore, on this day that the kohanim were starting their avodah for the first time, they all needed to have the status of Kohanim Gedolim. We want first times to be as perfect as possible. Therefore, we don't want the kohanim to be tameh on that day, even though in the future, it is permitted under those circumstances.

Rav Dikker cites in this connection a famous Pnei Yehoshua in Maseches Shabbos concerning the miracle of Chanukah. What is the miracle of Chanukah? They could not find pure oil to light the Menorah when they wanted to re-inaugurate the Beis Hamikdash after it had been desecrated by the Syrian-Greeks. They found a single pure flask of oil and a miracle happened that it burned for eight days until they could produce new pure oil. Everyone asks a basic question: The halacha is that Tumah hutra b'tzibbur, meaning that when all the kohanim are tameh, the service in the Beis Hamikdash can be done in a state of impurity. Why then were they so concerned about looking for pure oil? The answer is that this was the inaugural day of the Chanukas Hamikdash. At the time of inauguration, we don't rely on leniencies. We don't rely on the principle of Tumah hutra b'tzibbur. Beginnings need to be as perfect as humanly possible. B'dieved practices are not permitted at the time of inaugurations.

This, I once heard, is the idea behind the famous statement "Kol hascholosh kashos" (All beginnings are difficult). The reason why all beginnings are difficult is because we need to try to make all beginnings perfect. Beginnings are not intrinsically difficult (as we traditionally understand the statement). Rather, they are difficult because it is necessary to make them as perfect as possible, and that is hard.

The Brisker Rav notes that in Parshas Tetzaveh, by the first time they brought the Korbon Tamid (daily offering), it says "Es hakeves haechad ta'aseh ba'boker v'es hakeves hasheni ta'aseh bein ha'arbayim" (Shemos 29:39), whereas in Parshas Pinchas, by the Korbon Tamid, it says "Es hakeves echad ta'aseh ba'boker v'es hakeves hasheni ta'aseh bein ha'arbayim." Why only in Shemos does it use the prefix "hay" ("the") specifying "es hakeves haechad"?

The halacha is that if, for whatever reason, the morning Korban Tamid was not able to be brought, the afternoon Korban Tamid may still be offered. The only exception to this rule was the first time they were brought. The first time, they need to be paired exactly, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. That is because the first time everything needs to be done precisely correct.

Rav Elyashiv notes that when a Kohen Gadol begins his avodah for the very first time, he brings a Minchas Chinuch – a special flour offering to inaugurate his service in the Beis Hamikdash. In addition, the Kohen Gadol brings a daily mincha. Rav Elyashiv explains that this daily mincha can be understood as a kind of daily Minchas Chinuch – reflecting the idea that each day must be approached with the freshness of a first day. For a Kohen Gadol, each day on the job is like his first day.

Do we remember how it was the first time we did something? Do I remember the first shiur I ever gave? No!

Rav Elyashiv says the reason the kohen brings a mincha every day is because every day is like his first day.

The first time a person does something, he tries to do it to perfection. All the I's are dotted and all the T's are crossed. But with most people, when they do a job for ten, twenty, thirty, or forty years, their attitude changes: I will kvetch. I will get through it. No! The Kohen Gadol cannot be like that. Every day is a new beginning.

If that is the p'shat, we can say a new insight in the famous Rashi in Parshas Be'haloscha (Bamidbar 8:2). Rashi writes on the words "Va'ya'as ken Aharon" (And Aharon did so) "melamed she'lo sheena" (This teaches that he didn't change). Each day was as enthusiastic and fresh and exciting as the previous day – no matter how many years he did this job of lighting the Menorah. That is how each of the activities of the Kohen Gadol need to be.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Shmini is available with a complete catalogue available at Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2023 by Torah.org. Support Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/learn@torah.org> (410) 602-1350

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For the week ending 11 April 2026 / 24 Nisan 5786

Taamei Hamitzvos - Non-Kosher Animals

by **Rabbi Ze'ev Kraines**

Mitzvos 73, 153-165, and 470-471; Vayikra Ch. 11. Rambam observes that, as a general rule, whatever food the Torah forbids is not good for our health (Moreh Nevuchim vol. III §48). This is clear to see regarding the prohibitions against eating carcasses (neveilos) and terminally ill animals (tereifos), since these are commonly plagued with harmful microorganisms. With regard to pork, however, gentiles mock the Jewish people for abstaining from this seemingly healthy and tasty food (Yoma 67b). Hence, the Torah considers the prohibition against eating pork a chok, a decree with no readily apparent reason, which Hashem expects us to observe with unquestioning loyalty (ibid.). There are of course many reasons that are not readily apparent, such as the fact that the pig is a dirty and repulsive animal (Moreh Nevuchim ibid.). The pig is also symbolically repulsive, since it has the external kosher sign of split hooves but does not have the internal kosher sign of chewing its cud, and it thus represents the wicked nation of Edom, who mask inner depravity with a façade of righteousness (see Vayikra Rabbah 13:5). Radvaz (§185) shares the view that consuming non-kosher food is unhealthy. He supports this view by pointing out that the Torah prohibits the consumption of creeping creatures such as worms and other insects. The fact that these creatures are naturally repulsive to people is a clear sign that they are not healthy, because the body naturally repels anything harmful. Radvaz observed many terrible illnesses among gentiles that he did not encounter among Jews, and he attributed this to the Jewish people's kosher diet. Other commentators explain that non-kosher animals are unhealthy for the soul. The Sages similarly explain that consuming impure foods creates a blockage in the heart that hinders it from perceiving spiritual matters (see Yoma 39a). Following this view, Ramban explains that predatory birds are not kosher because cruelty is in their blood, and eating them instills cruelty within a person. We may add that the very commandment to refrain from eating such animals brings to our attention that Hashem finds aggression and cruelty unacceptable. Along these lines, Rabbeinu Menachem HaBavli suggests that having scales is a sign of kosher fish because it shows that they are preyed upon and require armor, which means that they are not predators (cited in Otzar HaMidrashim, Taryag HaMitzvos). According to this approach, presumably, non-kosher foods are primarily harmful to those who possess more refined and therefore more delicate souls. Of the various non-kosher creatures, the Torah places the most emphasis on creeping creatures such as insects, repeating some of the prohibitions several times. In one place, the Torah adds, “for I am Hashem, Who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God, and you shall be holy, for I am holy” (Vayikra 11:45). The Gemara (Bava Metzia 61b) interprets this verse to mean that this Mitzvah alone to abstain from eating creeping creatures would have been enough to justify the entire Exodus, since they are so repulsive. The verse cited by the Gemara says, “for I am Hashem, Who brought you up from Egypt” instead of the usual terminology “took you out of Egypt” to allude to the spiritual elevation that results from abstaining from eating such creatures. It emerges that one of the main reasons for the prohibition against eating creeping creatures is that they are repulsive. We may tentatively suggest that this is another reason for the prohibitions against eating other non-kosher creatures. Even gentiles eat mostly kosher animals, such as cows, sheep, and chickens, and are repulsed by the thought of eating horses, donkeys, and crows. Although gentiles eat many animals we do not eat, kosher animals are generally considered the most suited for consumption. Abarbanel links the distinction between kosher and non-kosher animals to their diets. Non-kosher animals consume the meat, bones, and blood of other animals, which endows them with a savage, hot-blooded nature. Since their food is not always common, their flesh is often gaunt and not nutritious. Kosher animals, on the other hand, are herbivores and possess a nature as calm and humble as the grass that they eat. Their food is available on the ground wherever they turn, and they therefore tend to be fat and nutritious. Kosher animals chew their cud because they are incapable of breaking apart bones with their teeth, and cannot even digest grass without first softening it

in their stomachs. Their split hooves are a sign of their passivity, because all predators have closed hooves with claws, which they use to attack and rip apart their prey. Abarbanel concludes that this is a general rule that has exceptions, such as the swine and the camel. These animals possess bad character traits and an impure nature, as indicated by the fact that they do not have both kosher signs.

RAV SCHACHTER ON THE PARSHA Part 2

Insights and Commentary Based on the Shiurim of Rav Hershel Schachter

Adapted by Dr. Allan Weissman <https://a.co/d/2aj0sJs>

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Parshas Shemini

Simanei Taharah

Rav Hershel Schachter

The Gemara in Bechoros (6a–6b) records a Beraisa that discusses the case of an animal of one species that, as a result of a mutation, bears an offspring resembling another species. We follow the opinion of the Chachamim that “a camel that was born from a cow”—that is, an offspring resembling a non-kosher animal born from a kosher animal—is kosher, even though it is missing the simanei taharah (the characteristics of a kosher animal) of mafreses parsah (split hooves) and ma’alas geirah (chewing its cud). Apparently, we view the simanim as necessary only to be kovei’a the min (species) as a min kosher. In other words, the recognition of simanim is critical in a particular animal only if we were to be presented with a species that is not yet identified as a kosher species. In a situation in which the animal is definitely the product of a recognized min tahor, it is kosher even without those simanim.

The requirement of fins and scales for kosher fish is similar. As the Gemara in Avodah Zarah (39a) teaches, a fish that does not presently have fins and scales, but is destined to grow them when it develops to maturity, is kosher even before the simanim develop. Clearly, it is not the checking for the presence of simanim that is matir (permits) the consumption of the fish; rather, the simanim are used to be kovei’a a certain species of fish as being kosher.

The Darchei Teshuvah (Yoreh De’ah 79:1, 83:1) elaborates on this idea in reference to the Sefer HaChinuch’s contention (mitzvah 153; see Minchas Chinuch) that there is an obligatory mitzvah aseh of bedikas simanim. The Chinuch writes that if one consumed an animal based on only one of the two simanei taharah, he has failed to fulfill the mitzvah of bedikas simanim, even if the animal did, in fact, possess the second siman. The Darchei Teshuvah explains that the mitzvah that the Chinuch describes only applies to a fish that is not recognized as belonging to a min tahor. Before one partakes of a fish of an unidentified species, there is a mitzvah to check for its simanim, but this does not apply to a fish known to belong to a kosher species.

Similarly, a shochet may perform shechitah on an animal without first checking its simanei taharah, as long as he recognizes the animal as belonging to a kosher species.

Some authorities disputed the permissibility of canned tuna fish based on the requirement of bedikas simanim. They argued that since in the factory in Puerto Rico only non-Jewish workers check each fish, we lack the matir of bedikah. However, this argument is incorrect. As we have seen, bedikas simanim is necessary only to establish a particular species as a min tahor. Once a species is recognized to be a min tahor, a fish from that species is permissible, even without examination of its simanim (see Ginas Egoz, p. 61).

The Beraisa in Bechoros also discusses the opposite case—that of an offspring resembling a kosher animal that was born from a non-kosher animal. We derive that this animal is forbidden for consumption from the passuk, “אך את זה לא תאכלו ממעלי הגרה וממפריסי הפרסה” — “But this you shall not eat from among those that chew their cud and that have split hooves” (Vayikra 11:4). Applying an additional level of interpretation to this passuk, Chazal understand that there may exist an animal that chews its cud and that has split hooves, but which is forbidden nonetheless.

It is unclear, however, whether such an animal, which possesses simanei taharah but which was born from a non-kosher animal, is treated like its mother in all areas of Halachah. The Pischei Teshuvah (Yoreh De'ah 79:2) quotes the Yad Eliyahu (siman 2), who deliberates the question of whether the animal is considered a beheimah teme'ah, like its mother, or whether the gezeiras hakasuv merely forbids it for achilah, but it is treated as a beheimah tehovah in other contexts by virtue of its simanei taharah.

On the one hand, as we have seen, the purpose of checking for simanei taharah is merely to be kovei'a whether a min is kosher or not. Thus, in this case, it may be argued that the presence of simanei taharah in the animal is inconsequential, since we know based on its mother that it certainly belongs to a min tamei.

Alternatively, the Yad Eliyahu suggests that perhaps there are two ways in which an animal can attain kosher status—either by belonging to a min beheimah tehovah or by possessing simanei taharah. In other words, simanim may confer the status of beheimah tehovah on an animal, even if the animal is not a member of a kosher species. Such an animal is certainly assur b'achilah, as the Beraisa teaches, but this may be due to an extraneous consideration—the fact that the animal was produced by a non-kosher animal. The Gemara in Chullin (64b) derives from the phrase “ואת בת היענה” — “and the daughter of the ostrich” (Vayikra 11:16), that the egg of a non-kosher bird is prohibited. This serves as the source for the general principle that היוצא מן האסור אסור — the product of that which is forbidden is forbidden. Accordingly, just as milk or eggs that are produced by a min tamei are forbidden, the offspring of a non-kosher animal is no different. There are a number of practical ramifications that result from labeling an animal with simanei taharah born from a non-kosher animal as essentially a min tahor that is assur b'achilah due to היוצא מן האסור אסור.

First, shechitah of an animal prevents it from conveying the tum'ah associated with a neveilah only if the animal is a min tahor; shechitah has no relevance to an animal that is deemed a beheimah teme'ah. Furthermore, the Rambam maintains (Hilchos Ma'achalos Assuros 3:6), against the view of Tosfos (Chullin 64a), that consuming a היוצא מן האסור is not prohibited as a lo sa'aseh, but only as an issur aseah, and therefore does not carry the penalty of malkos.

In addition, the status of cheilev (forbidden fats) applies only to a beheimah tehovah, not to a beheimah teme'ah (Chullin 117a). Thus, the permissibility of conducting business with cheilev would be extended to the cheilev of this animal only if it is considered a min tahor (Shach, Yoreh De'ah 64:2). Similarly, the issur of eiver min hachai (consuming the limb of a living animal), which is forbidden to a non-Jew as well, applies only to a min tahor (see Shach, Yoreh De'ah 62:3).

Although the Yad Eliyahu feels that we should be machmir on this question, since it remains a sfeika d'oraisa, he concludes that it is more compelling to argue that this animal is not classified as a full-fledged beheimah teme'ah. In Hilchos Sefer Torah (Yoreh De'ah 271:2), the Pischei Teshuvah again quotes the Yad Eliyahu, this time in reference to whether one may use the hide of a “tahor” animal born from a tamei animal for the klaf of a sefer Torah, tefillin, or mezuzos.

The Gemara in Shabbos (28b) cites the passuk regarding tefillin, “למען תהיה” — “so that the Torah of Hashem will be in your mouth” (Shemos 13:9), which is interpreted as teaching that the material on which tefillin are written must be מן המותר בפוך — from a species of animal that may be eaten. Likewise, with regard to the retzu'os, the Gemara teaches that only is fit for the service of Shamayim.

The Noda B'Yehudah (Mahadura Kamma, Orach Chaim 1, quoted by Sha'arei Teshuvah 32:27) writes that one should be stringent not to use black paint that contains etzem hapil (ground elephant tusk) for tefillin, since the requirement of מן המותר בפוך may apply even to something used to color tefillin.

The Gemara in Shabbos (108a) teaches that one may write tefillin on the hides of neveilos or tereifos of kosher animals. Clearly, then, מן המותר בפוך

refers not to specific animals that may be eaten, but to the entire min that may be eaten.

Likewise, the reason that the hide of a non-kosher animal may not be used for tefillin is that it is from a min tamei, not because it is assur b'achilah. In fact, the hide itself, because it is inedible, is not prohibited mid'oraisa; the issur achilah pertains only to the meat of an animal (Rambam, Hilchos Ma'achalos Assuros 4:18).

Since the principle of מן המותר בפוך requires only that the hide be taken from a min tahor, it should follow that the hide of a “tahor” animal born from a tamei animal is not excluded from use for tefillin. It may be argued that this animal is a min tahor by virtue of its simanei taharah; using its hide therefore would not constitute a violation of מן המותר בפוך, despite the fact that it remains prohibited to eat as a היוצא מן האסור.

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Rabbi Zweig on the Parsha - **Wearing The Same Robe**

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

Mon, Apr 6, 11:23 PM

Parshas Shemini

Wearing The Same Robe

“Do not drink intoxicating wine...” (10:9)

The Talmud compares the prohibition for a Kohein to perform the Priestly service after having imbibed wine to the prohibition for a judge or scholar to drink wine before rendering a legal decision.[1] What is the reason for the prohibition? If we are concerned that the judge might be inebriated, which could affect his decision, there would be no need to state that he should not drink prior to ruling, for it is obvious that a person should not render legal decisions while drunk. Furthermore, the prohibition placed upon the Kohein invalidates the service irrespective of whether or not it was performed correctly.[2] How does the law restricting the judge parallel the prohibition placed upon the Kohein if our concern for the judge is that his judgment will be impaired?

There are opinions that the prohibition applies only to drinking wine.[3] If the concern is a lack of sobriety, why should there be a distinction between wine and any other alcoholic beverage?

The service of the Kohein requires an awareness that he is standing before the King. The concern is not that he will be inebriated, rather that, due to wine consumption, he will lose some of the awareness which is required of him when serving his King. Therefore, even if the Kohein successfully performs the service it is disqualified due to his faulty mindset while performing it. Wine is the beverage of royalty and one who consumes it loses the ability to behave in a completely subservient manner.[4] Therefore, particularly wine impedes a person's ability to perform the Priestly service. The Talmud teaches that when rendering a legal decision the Beis Din is visited by the Divine Presence.[5] The judge is not the creator or source of the law, only its dispenser. He is the conduit for the Divine will. The Talmud is teaching us that when a judge renders a decision, he is also performing a Divine service. Much like the Kohein, he must be keenly aware that he stands before the King. It is therefore prohibited for him to consume wine; although it might not impair his judgment, it will impede upon his awareness of performing a Divine service.

1. Kerisos 13 2. Yad. Hil. Bias Mikdash 1:1 3. Ibid 1:3 4. Bereishis 49:11

5. Berachos 6a Too Close For Comfort “It was on the eighth day...” (9:1)

The Talmud teaches that when a portion of the Torah is introduced with the term “vayihi” — “and it was”, it is a precursor to tragic events.[1] Parshas Shemini describes the events that unfolded on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, the eighth day of the inauguration service. The portion is introduced with “vayihi”, denoting that it was a tragic day. The completion of the Mishkan brought Hashem the same joy as the creation of the world.[2] This day was also a great day for celebration for Bnei Yisroel for it represented the restoration of the relationship between themselves and Hashem, which had been damaged by the sin of the Golden Calf. Hashem's resting His presence

within the midst of Bnei Yisroel was received with jubilation and rejoicing.[3] Therefore, asks the Talmud, how could we define this day as tragic? The Talmud answers that it was tragic because of the deaths of the two sons of Aharon which occurred on this day.[4] If a person suffers the loss of a parent on his wedding day, the day is not entirely a tragedy. The loss does not preclude the wedding from being a joyous occasion. The Halacha requires a person who receives a great inheritance on the day that he suffers a loss to recite a blessing for his loss and a blessing for his windfall.[5] It is possible for a person to departmentalize his emotions. Why does the Torah begin the inauguration day with the expression “Vayihi bayom hashmini” – “And it was on the eighth day”, thereby defining the entire day as a tragedy? Since part of the day was a source of celebration why should the entire day be viewed as tragic? In Parshas Mishpotim Rashi notes that the elders of Bnei Yisroel, including Nadav and Avihu, sinned grievously by indulging in food and drink while gazing at the vision that was present at the Sinaitic revelation. Not wanting to mar the joyous atmosphere of Bnei Yisroel’s receiving the Torah, Hashem deferred the punishment of Nadav and Avihu to a later date.[6] Since Nadav and Avihu’s punishment was meted out at the inauguration of the Tabernacle, it can be ascertained that their actions on this occasion were a culmination of their actions at Sinai. What is the connection between the transgression which occurred at the inauguration of the Tabernacle and the transgression which occurred at the Sinaitic revelation? The reason for celebration was itself the source of the tragedy. If Nadav and Avihu had died in an unrelated incident, then the celebration and the tragedy could be separated. Nadav and Avihu’s deaths must have been an outgrowth of the day’s celebration, thereby defining the entire day as tragic. The familiarity and closeness that is created between two parties in a relationship is fraught with great danger. Intimacy often results in the loss of respect for one another. The distance that exists at the inception of a relationship creates a certain level of respect. As that distance is removed and the parties become comfortable with one another, the respect diminishes. The level of respect shown during courtship is usually much greater than that during marriage. The intimacy of the relationship sometimes sows the seeds for disrespect. Hashem’s descending upon Bnei Yisroel created an unparalleled level of intimacy between the two parties. While Hashem’s presence was at a distance there existed awe and respect for Him. Once He descended, this intimacy created the possibility for the boundaries of respect to be breached. The deaths of Nadav and Avihu were a result of the very intimacy that was being celebrated. The closeness that they felt to Hashem allowed them to act inappropriately and their deaths served as a warning to Bnei Yisroel not to make the same mistake. Respect must remain to maintain the integrity of the relationship. This was not the first time Bnei Yisroel fell prey to this mistake. At the Sinaitic revelation the same scenario occurred. The Elders indulged in food and drink while gazing at the Divine Vision that was present. Hashem waited until the inauguration of the Mishkan, where this indiscretion was repeated, before meting out the appropriate punishment. 1.1.Megillah 10b 2.Ibid 3.Rashi Shemos 31:18 and Seforno 26:9 4.Megillah ibid 5.Shulchan Aruch Orech Chaim 223:1 6.Shemos 24:11

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Rav A. Leib Scheinbaum

פרשת שמ׳ני Shemini Parashas

ידם אהרן

And Aharon was silent. (10:3)

On what should have been the most exalted and auspicious day of Aharon HaKohen’s life—the inauguration of the Mishkan with Aharon as the Kohen Gadol, alongside his sons who would serve as Kohanim—he was stunned by the sudden (what appeared to be) inexplicable and devastating loss of his two sons. They did not just die. They were struck by a Heavenly conflagration

which burned from within, leaving their bodies intact. The Torah describes Aharon’s heroic response: no response, Va’yidom Aharon; “And Aharon was silent (actually mute).”

Prior to attempting to explain Aharon’s response and from where he took the extraordinary fortitude to remain mute in the face of tragedy, we first take note of a significant nuance in the text. The Torah does not say dom Aharon, that Aharon was silent, but rather, va’yidom—a verb form that subtly focuses on the future, implying continuity, an unfolding silence. Aharon’s silence was not a one-time expression to tragedy; rather, it was a conscious, enduring stance which imbued generations of Jews throughout the millennia with the ability to confront tragedy with emunah, restraint and dignity. All future generations were infused with Aharon’s silent strength and stoicism. He taught us how to grieve—without rebellion, and how to accept the most bitter decree with quiet nobility.

Having said this, we now must ask: From where did Aharon derive such strength? From where did he garner the spiritual fortitude to remain mute in the face of such overwhelming tragedy? How can we learn from him? How can we, who are far removed from his spiritual stature, derive a lesson to enable us to confront challenge and even tragedy?

Perhaps the following story might lend some insight from which we may glean a deeper understanding of Aharon HaKohen. A terrible tragedy occurred in Yerushalayim when a bomb went off on a bus, taking the life of the son of one of Yerushalayim’s most illustrious Torah scholars. The tragedy was overwhelming; the grief was debilitating as the family sat dumbstruck in deep shock, attempting to make sense of what had happened. One walked into the shivah house to the sounds of the bitter weeping of the family members.

In walked Horav Nota Tzeinvirth, zl, a well-known Yerushalmi tzadik, a Boyaner chasid. He immediately sat down next to the father of the deceased. When he came in, the other members of the family moved closer to hear what he would say. He turned to the father and said, “I have a halachic query to share with you. What would happen if Avraham Avinu had, in fact, slaughtered Yitzchak Avinu? Would he have had to sit shivah, observe seven days of mourning, for him?”

The father replied, “It makes sense that he would have kept all the rituals connected with mourning.”

Rav Nota interjected, “Do you know why? Because if he would not have sat shivah (because this was a Heavenly-mandated decree to sacrifice Yitzchak), it would appear as if we sit shivah only when Hashem does not want a person to die. This is categorically impossible, because if Hashem does not want a person to die, he will not die. Apparently, the obligation to sit shivah applies even when Hashem wants a person to die.

“I am alluding to a powerful principle which you must accept: If your son was killed, it is because this was the ratzon, will, of Hashem. He also wants you to mourn, because that is part of the process. However, He does not want you to mourn excessively. This, too, is the ratzon Hashem.”

The family understood the message: Everything that occurs is the will of G-d. We must accept it as such.

Having said this, let us now return to Aharon and attempt to understand his superhuman response to the enormous tragedy of losing his two sons. We are taught that Aharon accepted the ratzon Hashem, the will of the Almighty. Ordinarily, we perceive existence as comprising three distinct entities: Hashem, His will, and man. Man has desires; Hashem has a will. We often experience life as a tension between the two.

Not so with Aharon. Aharon did not view himself as a separate entity standing opposite the Divine will; rather, he saw himself as at one with the Divine Will. His personal identity was so completely aligned with the ratzon Hashem that, when that will changed, Aharon changed. He had no inner conflict, no clash between “what I want” and “what Hashem wants,” because Aharon had no independent will of his own. His entire essence was an extension of the Divine will. Thus, when Hashem decreed a reality that shattered the human heart, Aharon did not need to suppress emotion or conquer resentment. He had nothing to conquer. His silence was not forced;

it was natural. His will had already been surrendered, long before tragedy struck.

This is the legacy of vayidom Aharon—not silence born of numbness or speechlessness to a mind-numbing tragedy; rather, it was silence that resulted from a deep unity between man and Hashem—a total abnegation of self in order to align with the will of Hashem.

Horav Aryeh Levin, zl, was no stranger to adversity and suffering. During his lifetime, he buried children, lived in abject poverty in which the only thing palpable in his house was hunger. His body was weakened by illness, and his life was marked by quiet suffering. Yet, he never once uttered a word of complaint. He did not merely endure his suffering; he accepted it.

When asked how he was able to sustain so much loss, Rav Aryeh remarked with utter simplicity, “If Hashem gave this to me, then obviously He feels I am able to carry the load.” This was Rav Aryeh’s mission statement of emunah. He saw pain not as Hashem abandoning him, but rather as Divine trust and confidence in his ability to succeed.

וידם אהרן

And Aharon was silent. (10:3)

The Torah praises Aharon HaKohen’s silence in the face of tragedy. What distinguishes silence from speech? Should Aharon not have eulogized his two sons for all the exemplary qualities they possessed? Should he not have wept copious tears over the terrible personal and communal loss of two such shining stars?

Horav Aviezer Piltz, shlita, explains that when Moshe Rabbeinu said, “B’kerovai Ekadesh v’al pnei kol ha’am Eichabed,” Moshe responded, “I knew that the Mishkan would be sanctified through someone within whom G-d’s glory reposes, but I thought it would be one of us. Now I know that they were greater than we are.”

When Aharon became aware of his sons’ extraordinary spiritual stature, he realized that any verbal expression on his part would barely scratch the surface. Speech has limits. Words are confined by syntax and vocabulary. Silence, however, has no boundaries. It allows the mind to expand and grasp what words cannot.

Silence, by its very nature, has neither structure nor limitation. It allows for the loss to be felt from all perspectives. The most powerful hesped may, in fact, be the one not delivered.

Chanah, mother of Shmuel HaNavi, prayed silently—her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. Horav Nachman Breslover explains that her tefillah came from such depth that sound would have diminished it. A silent cry can break barriers that sound cannot penetrate.

ומפתח אהל מועד לא תצאו פן תמתו

Do not leave the entrance of the Ohel Moed, lest you die. (10:7)

The Rambam (Hilchos Bi’as Mikdash 2:5) writes that a Kohen who leaves the Bais HaMikdash during the Avodah may be liable for death. One should not abandon the sacred service in a rushed or distracted manner.

Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, applies this practically. How often do we rush through tefillah because of an appointment? In doing so, we subtly indicate that our engagement with Hashem is secondary. Even during bentching, when the phone rings, we feel pressured to hurry. We interrupt our connection with Hashem for what seems urgent—but is it truly more important?

A Rav once delayed his flight rather than rush Shemoneh Esrei. He missed his plane, yet everything ultimately worked out. The message was clear: doing what Hashem wants is what matters.

Throughout Jewish history, the title HaKadosh was reserved for those whose holiness was palpable—individuals like the Ohr HaChaim, the Shlah, and the Baal Shem Tov.

Horav Moshe Alshich, known as the Alshich HaKadosh, was one such figure. His teachings reflected profound spiritual depth. Stories are told of his influence—even appearing in dreams to save lives—and of the Arizal witnessing truths revealed through his Torah.