

In My Opinion COUNTING

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

We are now in the midst of the period on the Jewish calendar when we are engaged in a daily countdown towards the holiday of Shavuot. This commandment of counting the days begins with the offering of the first new grain of the Pesach harvest and concludes with the new produce of the agricultural year in the temple in Jerusalem on the holiday of Shavuot.

Each of the 49 intervening days as well as the seven weeks that pass between the holidays is to be counted. There is a difference of opinion as to whether each day is a commandment by itself or rather the total of 49 days, when completed, also marks the fulfillment of the biblical commandment. It is clear, though, that the Torah is insistent on this count during the interim between these two major holidays of the Jewish calendar.

Now, the fact that the holiday of Shavuot marks the anniversary date of the Revelation at Sinai and the granting of the Torah to the Jewish people, it seems obvious that we should be counting towards a great event and doing so with anticipation and optimism. It is therefore strange that the count that we do make is, so to speak, a backward count – is counting the days that have passed and not counting the of days of glory and significance that are yet to come.

We should count on the first night that there are now 49 more days to come and every night thereafter naturally reduces that number by the number that has already passed. Instead, we count that it was day one or day two, etc. – days that have already passed and will never return.

Our great teacher Moshe in one of the chapters of Psalms that he authored, stated that we were endowed with the knowledge to count our days so that we may obtain for ourselves a heart of wisdom. Since the future is always unknown, the import of this lesson is that we should count the days that have already advanced as well as the present days to become wiser and better people.

Counting days that have passed automatically causes us to reflect on what was accomplished and what was left undone. We remember past accomplishments as well as past deficiencies. We have a certain perspective on the past that we are completely unable to have regarding the future. However, by contemplating our past and learning from our experiences, and gaining from our studies and knowledge, we can become wiser. And that wisdom once again will benefit us no matter what the future brings. Experiencing the past allows one to have a more balanced and sanguine approach to the future, unknown as it is and anxious as we may be regarding it.

Perhaps this is what King Solomon meant when he stated that what was is what will be – meaning that what was will help define, explain, and protect us from what will yet be in the unknown future.

I think that it is in this vein that the commandment of counting the days between these two major Jewish holidays was ordered upon us. Accepting the Torah in every generation and for every individual requires some degree of preparation – mental, emotional, moral, spiritual, and intellectual. Without such preparation it will be hard to maintain the values and lifestyle that the Torah stands for and demands from us.

This preparation can only be obtained by reviewing our past behavior, knowledge, and lessons of life. We are bidden to count backwards, so to speak, to be able to progress in a meaningful fashion towards the acceptance of Torah as the bedrock of our faith and lifestyle. It is this realization that the past weighs heavily upon us, whether we want it or not, that both Moshe and King Solomon wish to impart to us in their immortal words. We all are aware of the dread that we have that the past will somehow escape us and that we will remain no longer human beings in the fullest sense of the word but rather shadows of our former selves... realizing what we could have been.

Counting values is therefore important and even though we are commanded to do so for only 49 days, mentally and spiritually it is a

year-round discipline that can only enhance our physical and spiritual lives.

Shabbat shalom

Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha SHMINI 5781

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

One of the more distinguishing life values which Judaism advocates is the type of food that a Jew eats. There are foods that Jews are commanded to eat such, as matzah on Pesach and continuing with Pesach, there are also forbidden foods such as leavened bread. The laws and customs regarding kosher food are numerous and complex. Perhaps no other area of Jewish life, except for the Sabbath and its laws, has evoked, over the centuries, so much scholarship and divergence of opinions regarding Halacha and practice.

There are clear lines that establish the basic rules regarding kosher food. There have been many explanations and reasons given regarding this facet of Jewish life, concerning permissible and forbidden foods. These reasons range from the mysteries of kabalistic thought to the seemingly practical ideas of good health and proper diet. But, even after all the rational explanations have been expounded upon, the laws of kosher food remain one of the great commandments of the Torah for which we have no completely rational explanation. Therefore, Kashrut belongs in the realm of Chukim -- laws and commandments that we follow simply because that is will, so to speak, of our Creator. Our limited capacity of human understanding makes for the mystery behind the commandment. But the commandment itself stands, and it is binding for whatever reason we may or may not assign to it and its performance.

One thing is crystal-clear and all Jewish history attests to this commandment. The consumption of only kosher food has been one of the main contributors to the survival of Judaism and the Jewish people over the ages. It has created the necessary boundary that delineates us and our faith. By so doing, it has given us a deep realization that being a Jew relates also to the body and internal organs of a person, and not only the cerebral notion of religion that many people have.

It is very important to be a good Jew in heart and mind. But for all the unknown and unseen reasons that lie behind the survival of the Jewish people over the millennia against all odds, it is just as important, if not even more so, to be a good Jew in one's stomach. Difficulties in maintaining proper standards in kosher food and the abandonment by many secular Jews of the entire concept of kosher food, has inevitably contributed the rates of assimilation and intermarriage of their succeeding generations. People who can eat together eventually realize they can socialize together, and the rest is obvious.

One of the great blessings of our modern time is the abundance of all types of kosher food. In Israel and in the United States there is little challenge left in having to observe the commandments of kosher food. Nevertheless, a large section of the Jewish people still has not broken the bad habit of past generations, and we are faced with numerous crises of disappointments in Jewish national life. As the Torah is our friend and protector, we should always be aware of its demands. It is for our own sake that we should do so.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

Reticence vs. Impetuosity (Shemini 5781)

Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.

It should have been a day of joy. The Israelites had completed the Mishkan, the Sanctuary. For seven days Moses had made preparations for its consecration.[1] Now on the eighth day – the first of Nissan – one year to the day since the Israelites had received their first command two

weeks prior to the Exodus (Ex. 40:2) – the service of the Sanctuary was about to begin (Lev. 9:1 – 24). The Sages say that in Heaven it was the most joyous day since Creation (Megillah 10b).

But tragedy struck. The two elder sons of Aaron “offered a strange fire that had not been commanded” (Lev. 10:1) and the fire from heaven that should have consumed the sacrifices consumed them as well. They died. Aaron’s joy turned to mourning. “Vayidom Aharon” meaning, “And Aaron was silent.” (Lev. 10:3) The man who had been Moses’ spokesman could no longer speak. Words turned to ash in his mouth.

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

First there is the story about Aaron. We read about how Moses told him to begin his role as High Priest. “Moses [then] said to Aaron, ‘Approach the altar, and prepare your sin offering and burnt offering, thus atoning for you and the people. Then prepare the people’s offering to atone for them, as God has commanded’” (Lev. 9:7).

The Sages sensed a nuance in the words, “Approach the altar,” as if Aaron was standing at a distance from it, reluctant to come near. They said: “Initially Aaron was ashamed to come close. Moses said to him, ‘Do not be ashamed. This is what you have been chosen to do.’”[2]

Why was Aaron ashamed? Tradition gave two explanations, both brought by Nachmanides in his commentary to the Torah. The first is that Aaron was simply overwhelmed with trepidation at coming so close to the Divine Presence. The second is that Aaron, seeing the “horns” of the altar, was reminded of the Golden Calf, his great sin. How could he, who had played a key role in that terrible event, now take on the role of atoning for the people’s sins? That surely demanded an innocence he no longer had. Moses had to remind him that it was precisely to atone for sins that the altar had been made; and the fact that he had been chosen by God to be High Priest was an unequivocal sign that he had been forgiven.

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

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

The other story is the tragic one, of Aaron’s two sons, Nadav and Avihu, who “offered a strange fire, that had not been commanded.” The Sages offered several readings of this episode, all based on a close reading of the several places in the Torah where their death is referred to. Some said they had been drinking alcohol.[3] Others said that they were arrogant, holding themselves up above the community; this was the reason they had never married.[4]

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

However we read the episode, it seems clear that they were all too eager to exercise leadership. Carried away by their enthusiasm to play a part in the inauguration, they did something they had not been commanded to do. After all, had Moses not done something entirely on his own initiative, namely breaking the tablets when he came down the mountain and saw the Golden Calf? If he could act spontaneously, why not they?

They forgot the difference between a Priest and a Prophet. As we have seen in previous Covenant & Conversations, a Prophet lives and acts in time – in this moment that is unlike any other. A Priest acts and lives in eternity, by following a set of rules that never change. Everything about

“the holy,” the realm of the Priest, is precisely scripted in advance. The holy is the place where God, not man, decides.

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

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

These are, perennially, the two challenges leaders must overcome. The first is the reluctance to lead. Why me? Why should I get involved? Why should I undertake the responsibility and all that comes with it – the high levels of stress, the sheer volume of work, and the never-ending criticisms leaders always have to face? Besides which, there are other people better qualified and more suited than I am.

Even the greatest were reluctant to lead. Moses at the Burning Bush found reason after reason to show that he was not the man for the job. Isaiah and Jeremiah both felt inadequate. Summoned to lead, Jonah ran away. The challenge really is daunting. But when you feel as if you are being called to a task, if you know that the mission is necessary and important, then there is nothing you can do but say, Hineni, “Here I am.” (Ex. 3:4) In the words of a famous book title, you have to “feel the fear and do it anyway.”[5]

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

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

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

Nadav and Avihu were surely great people. The trouble was that they believed they were great people. They were not like their father Aaron, who had to be persuaded to come close to the altar because of his sense of inadequacy. The one thing Nadav and Avihu lacked was a sense of their own inadequacy.[6]

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

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

Parshat Shemini (Leviticus 9:1 – 11:47)

By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed (the two sons of Aaron) and they died before the Lord" (Leviticus 10:2) the celebration of the dedication of the Sanctuary. Aaron's greatest triumphs turned tragedy. And one of the deepest Biblical mysteries is the reason why God Himself sent down a fire to consume them. Why?

The Midrash (VaYikrah Rabbah 12,1) attempts to provide an explanation:

"It seems impossible to understand why God would have caused them to die. And then comes the explanation in the verse which appears immediately after this incident; 'And the Lord said to Aaron saying, do not drink wine or mead, neither you nor your sons with you, when you enter into the Tent of Meeting so that you do not die. It is an eternal statutes for your generations so that you may distinguish between the holy and the profane, between the impure and the pure'"

Apparently the Midrash is teaching that Nadav and Avihu were given this capital punishment because they had brought a fire unto God which had not been commanded while having become intoxicated with wine. From this perspective, wine – which removes the ability of the individual to distinguish between the Holy and the profane, between the pure and the impure – can lead to evil action and can bring about tragic consequences. And indeed at least according to one Rabbi Meir's view in the Talmud (B.T. Sanhedrin 70A, 70B), "The fruit from which Adam ate was the fruit of the vine because there is nothing which brings greater woe to the individual than wine". And of course it was Noah's planting of the vineyards which caused him to become drunk; The Midrash even goes so far as to suggest that Satan was Noah's partner and convinced him to plant a vineyard and drink from its fruit.

At the same time however we have just concluded the festival of Passover whose first Seder night is punctuated by four cups of the wine which symbolizes redemption. The Talmud goes on to teach "There is no joy without wine since 'wine gladdens the heart of humanity'" (B.T. Pesachim 109A). And further enjoins that we 'Remember (the Sabbath day) on wine' both at the inception of the Sabbath day by means of the Kiddush and at the closing of the Sabbath day by means of Havdallah. Is it not strange that the very wine which has the capability of causing forgetfulness and debauchery drunkenness can also be used as a means towards understanding and distinguishing. After all the very reference to Havdallah (separation between the Holy and the profane) is placed in the blessing in which we ask God to provide us with understanding and the ability to distinguish. In the words of our Sages, "If there is no knowledge how is it possible to distinguish between night and day, the Sabbath and the rest of the week, the holy and the profane. And the blessing of Havdallah is specifically recited over wine!"

The Talmud links wine with the Hebrew word *Tirosh* which is usually translated as grape; the Hebrew *Rosh* means head and the Hebrew *Rash* means poverty. If the individual who drinks the wine has merit, he will become a head; if not he will become a pauper. Wine therefore can lead the individual in two very opposite and even antithetical directions. It depends on the individual drinking the wine.

Maimonides, who first establishes the fact that the joy of the festival must be expressed through meat and wine, goes on to distinguish between drunken frivolity and joyous festivity "Drunkenness and much frivolity and levity is not rejoicing but is foolish hooliganism". We were not commanded to be foolish hooligans but rather to be joyous servant in the service of the creator of all things. The Bible even states that "curses will come upon us because 'you did not serve the Lord your God in joyousness and good heartedness'". (Maimonides Chapter 6 of Laws of the Festival Law 20)

And later on, at the end of his Laws of the Lulav (8:15) "the joy with which the individual must rejoice is by means of the doing of the

commandments and loving the Lord; such joy is a great act of divine service".

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik magnificently explains that the more energy the human being expends, the greater will be the sanctity and the deeper will be the joy. Ordinary juice is extracted from the fruit merely by squeezing it, wine is produced by the vine only by a long and arduous process, and therefore wine demands a separate and unique blessing. Apparently Nadav and Avihu, at least according to the Midrash we cited previously, went into the Tent of Meeting of the Sanctuary having already been intoxicated "You shall not drink wine or mead when you come into the Tent of Meeting" (VaYikrah Rabbah 12,1) The Sabbath wine on the other hand is a very different experience. We are commanded to "make (Laasot)" the Sabbath, and when we hold aloft the wine goblet of Havdallah it is after we have spent at least most of Friday in preparation for the holy day. Wine which is drunk before one has expended energy and accomplished an ideal will lead to drunkenness; only wine which comes to express an inner state of sanctity and accomplishment as a result of successful human effort will lead to great joy. In the words of one of my great teachers Rav Poleyoff: 'If you are empty inside and expect the wine to put in the joy, the wine will only lead to forgetfulness and drunkenness; but if you are filled inside with a deep sense of self worth and accomplishment – and you see the wine as an expression of your own state of human happiness – then the wine will lead to true rejoicing, sanctity and remembrance of the Divine Shabbat Shalom

Insights Parshas Shemini Nissan 5781

Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic Universit

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Pesl bas Mendel Volf. "May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

Heaven on Earth

And it was on the eighth day... (9:1)

This week's parsha begins with Aharon and his sons' eighth day of the inauguration into the priesthood of serving in the Mishkan (see Rashi ad loc). The Talmud (Megillah 10b) makes a very interesting comment on this possuk; "it was taught in a Baraisa – [on this eighth day] Hashem rejoiced as when he created the heavens and earth." What does the inauguration of the Mishkan have to do with the creation of the world?

Furthermore, we also find a cryptic reference to joy regarding the eighth day of inauguration of the Mishkan in Rashi in Shir Hashirim. The verse states, "Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, and on the day of the gladness of his heart" (3:11). Rashi (ad loc) explains the crown of the wedding day refers to the day that Bnei Yisroel accepted upon them the yoke of Torah – the day they received the Torah at Mount Sinai, and "the day of the gladness of his heart refers to the eighth day of the inauguration of the Mishkan."

So once again, we find that there is immense joy on the eighth day of the inauguration of the Mishkan (we are also compelled to point out that according to this Chazal a person's wedding day isn't necessarily the happiest day of one's life – sorry ladies). So what is the source of this unbridled joy attached to the final day of the inauguration of the Mishkan?

Hashem created the world to provide a vehicle for man to achieve the ultimate in goodness – a relationship with Hashem. The joy that was experienced in the creation of the world was the exciting anticipation of creating a home for man to exist in where he could earn all the good Hashem wanted to bestow.

The ultimate fulfillment of this vision was when Bnei Yisroel built a Mishkan, a home for Hashem, and invited Him to dwell in their midst in order to achieve the ultimate in good that Hashem could bestow in this world: A close personal relationship with Hashem. Building the Mishkan was in fact quite similar to the creation of the world; Chazal teach us that the reason Betzalel was chosen as the architect was because he alone knew how to combine all the letters that were used in creation and he utilized that knowledge to create the Mishkan.

R' Chaim Volozhin says, in the first chapter of his epic work *Nefesh Hachaim*, that the Mishkan is a miniature model of the universe, as is the human body. In other words, Bnei Yisroel modeled Hashem's behavior: Hashem created his world and invited man to live in it, and man created a similar world and invited Hashem to dwell with them. This parallel act was why the joy of creating the world was the same joy experienced at the inauguration of the Mishkan. The creation of the Mishkan was the ultimate fulfillment of Hashem's plan of giving man the opportunity to have a relationship with his creator.

To Eat or Not to Eat

To distinguish between the impure and the pure, and between the animals that can be eaten and those animals which you should not eat (11:47).

At the end of this week's parsha we have forty seven verses devoted to the identification of the various kosher and non-kosher animals, fish, birds, and insects. The very last verse in the parsha contains a fascinating structural anomaly.

Kosher animals are referred to as animals that may be eaten (vegans take heart – there isn't a command to eat them), while non-kosher animals are identified as those that you may not eat. The Torah is clearly distinguishing a difference between kosher animals and non-kosher animals. Kosher animals are designated as edible, while non-kosher animals are not designated as inedible; rather they are merely designated as prohibited on the individual to consume. While this may seem to be a slight variation, it is in fact a monumental distinction.

Maimonides in his famous introduction to *Pirkei Avos* (Ethics of our Fathers), the philosophical work known as *Shemoneh Prakim*, discusses a fascinating question regarding moral achievement. Rambam wonders: What is a higher level of achievement; is it better for one to not want to sin or is it better for one to desire to sin but control his desires?

Maimonides answers that it depends on the type of sin one desires to do. He divides sins into two categories. The first is those that "are commonly agreed upon evils such as murder, theft, ingratitude, contempt for one's parents, and the like. These are sins that the rabbis have said 'even if they hadn't been written into law it would be proper to add them.'" The second category is of sins that if the Torah hadn't forbidden them they would not be considered transgressions at all. This includes: laws of kashrut, prohibition of wool and linen clothes, consanguineous marriages, and such (*Shemoneh Prakim*, Chapter 6).

According to Maimonides, regarding the first category of "rational sins," it is better not to want to do the sin. As he terms it; "a soul that desires these sins has a defect." The second category contains sins that are only forbidden because the Torah prohibits them, not because they are morally wrong. Regarding these sins it is better to say, "I desire them but what am I to do, Hashem has forbidden them."

Maimonides' remarkable distinction may also have very practical applications to those who either grew up without knowledge of the Torah commandments or those who accepted the yoke of Torah later in life, such as converts. How are they to view the indiscretions of their past? Are they permitted to look fondly on their earlier lives when they enjoyed eating lobster and cheese burgers? Perhaps the answer is yes, and they get even more reward knowing that in their current lives they freely choose to adhere to those laws because Hashem has forbidden them.

This is why the Torah describes the non-kosher animals in this week's parsha as those that one is commanded not to eat, rather than calling them inedible.

There are many who try to explain the laws of kashrut as rational outcomes for better health: eating pork could cause trichinosis, mixing milk and meat has deleterious effects on the body, eating properly slaughtered meat has less toxins and hormones than animals that are slaughtered in a non-kosher way, shrimp and lobster have exceedingly high cholesterol levels, etc. – therefore kosher is a healthier way to live. While some of these claims are valid, the overall theory is faulty. The reason we don't eat these forbidden animals isn't because they are "inedible," we don't eat them simply because Hashem has forbidden them to be eaten.

Did You Know...

In this week's parsha we have a very detailed account of what the Jewish people are permitted to eat. The only permitted animals are those that have split hooves and chew their cud. Chazal state that since the Torah's list of animals that have a single indicator (either split hooves or chew their cud) is very detailed, Chazal created other indicators so we could easily identify kosher animals (*Chullin* 59a; *Shulchan Aruch*, YD 79:1). They concluded that any animal that chews its cud is kosher if it is not one of the three exceptions stated in the Torah. They also stated that all animals that do not have upper incisors, canines, or soft front tooth-like structures and chew their cud are kosher, with the one exception of the young camel.

In other words, the adult camel and the other two examples, while chew their cud, still possess these "teeth" that are not found in kosher animals. This dental indicator is considered enough to understand that an animal is kosher. So, if one were to come across an unknown animal that was not a young camel and found it to have no upper incisors, he may eat it.

The Chachamim further stated that every animal that has completely split hooves also chews its cud and is therefore kosher, with the singular notable biblical exception – the pig (*Sefer HaEshkol*; *Shulchan Aruch*, YD 79:1). Therefore, any unknown species that has split hooves and is not a pig is kosher.

Interestingly, Chazal added an additional identifying feature of kosher animals that seemingly has no basis in the written Torah and is based solely on an oral tradition received by Moshe at Mount Sinai: Other than the wild donkey (in Hebrew – *arod*), no non-kosher animal has meat under the tail with grain that runs both ways. Therefore, if one slaughters an unknown animal and finds that the grain of its meat runs both ways, and knows that it is not a wild donkey, then the meat is kosher.

Additionally, the Mishna (*Niddah* 51b), at least according to Rashi's understanding, states that horns alone are enough to declare an animal kosher, since all horned animals are kosher.

Finally, it's important to note that scientists have classified many thousands of animals since the Torah was given to Bnei Yisroel 3,300 years ago, and in that time many thousands of new animals have been discovered. However, not one of the new animals has ever qualified as an added exception to those specifically written in the Torah. In other words, pigs are still the only animals with split hooves that don't chew their cud, and camels, shafans, and arneveses (the other two animals the Torah mentions), are still the only cud-chewing animals without split hooves!

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Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Parashat Shemini

Keeping Kosher

"Lest you become contaminated." (11:43)

The road to holiness does not start with lofty ideals or sublime thoughts. It does not begin with a mind-expanding revelation or a "close encounter." It cannot be produced by psychotropic drugs, nor can it be experienced by climbing the Alps or the Andes.

True, gazing down from Mont Blanc or Everest may fill us with awe at the Creator's handiwork. Nature can truly inspire closeness to G-d, but all this inspiration will vanish like a cloud of smoke if we lack the fundamental ingredients needed to concretize inspiration into actuality.

The road to holiness starts with a few small boring steps — such as being a decent, moral person, and controlling our emotions and appetites.

As Jews, we may not eat what we like when we like. On Pesach we may not eat bread. On Yom Tov we should eat meat. On Yom Kippur we may eat nothing. At all times, we may not eat the forbidden foods, which is the subject of this week's Torah portion.

“Lest you become contaminated.” In Hebrew, this sentence is expressed as one word: v’nitmayhem. The spelling of this word is unusual. It lacks an aleph and thus it can also read as v’nitumtem, which means “Lest you become dulled.”

In our search for holiness and meaning in this world, our greatest assets and aids are the laws of kashrut. Kosher food is soul food. Food for the soul. Food that feeds our spirituality and sharpens our ability to receive holiness. Food that is not kosher does the reverse. It dulls our spiritual senses. It makes us less sensitive, less receptive to holiness. A Jew who tries to seek holiness sitting on top of some mountain in the Far East, living on a diet of salted pork, will find it impossible to achieve his goal. The view of the Ganges or the Himalayas (or his own navel!) may titillate his spiritual senses, but he will find no growth or nourishment reaching his core.

The spiritual masters teach that if a person contaminates himself a little, he becomes contaminated a great deal. Spirituality is a delicate thing. It does not take much to jam the broadcast from Upstairs. On the other hand, a little bit of holiness goes a long way. As the Torah teaches, “You shall sanctify yourselves, and you shall become holy.” (Lev. 11:44) A little bit of sanctity generates a lot of holiness. If we sanctify ourselves down here in this lowly world, with all its barriers to holiness, if we guard our mouths, our eyes and our ears, then the Torah promises us that we will be given Divine help to lift us to lofty peaks of holiness.

It all starts with one small step.

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Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message - Shemini 5781-2021

“Using, Not Abusing, a Sanctified Substance”

(updated and revised from Shemini 5763-2003)

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This week’s parasha, parashat Shemini, opens at a most auspicious event, on the eighth and final day of the inauguration ceremony of the newly erected Tabernacle. The calendar date is the first of Nissan, also the day that Aaron and his sons were to be consecrated into the priesthood to serve as priests—Kohanim.

This day, for Aaron, was the day he had dreamed of for his entire life.

Aaron’s life had not been easy. Alone, he had suffered through the travails of leadership in Egypt during the early days of the enslavement period. After Moses returned to Egypt from Midian, Aaron had served faithfully at his brother’s side, confronting Pharaoh and demanding that the Israelites be allowed to leave Egypt to worship for three days. He tried unsuccessfully to dissuade the newly freed people from worshipping the Golden Calf. Now, finally, after all his efforts and much grief, Aaron was to be installed as the High Priest of Israel. Even more satisfying was the fact that his four sons were going to serve alongside him.

Describing the consecration ceremony, the Torah, in Leviticus 10:1, reports, וַיִּקְחוּ בְנֵי אַהֲרֹן נֹדָב וַאֲבִיהוּא, אִישׁ מִתְּחוּמוֹ, וַיִּתְּנוּ בְהֶן אֵשׁ, וַיִּשְׂימוּ עָלֶיהָ קִטְרוֹת, , And the sons of Aaron, Nadav and Abihu, each took their fire pan and placed fire on it, and placed incense on the pan, and sacrificed the incense before G-d with a strange fire which G-d had not commanded. Suddenly, in the midst of the consecration ceremony, a fire comes forth from G-d and consumes Nadav and Abihu.

Moses tries to console his brother concerning the young men’s death, recalling to Aaron that G-d had said to him (Leviticus 10:3): בְּקִרְבִי אֶקְדָּשׁ , “I shall be sanctified with those who are nigh to Me!” He explained to Aaron, that through death, G-d had sanctified and elevated Nadav and Abihu. Aaron’s reaction to the tragedy is then recorded (Leviticus 10:3): וַיִּדָּם אַהֲרֹן—total silence.

The young men’s bodies were then removed from the Tabernacle, and the Torah immediately instructs the remaining children of Aaron, Elazar and Ithamar, regarding the limitations of priestly mourning. This instruction is then followed by the law prohibiting priests to be in a state of inebriation when performing the sacred service.

While the deaths of Nadav and Abihu were a tragedy for the entire Jewish nation, the event was truly heartbreaking for their father, Aaron.

At the moment of his highest joy, he loses two of his precious children. Nevertheless, his reaction is silence, probably because there really is nothing that can be said by a parent, or to a parent, who loses a child.

The rabbis, who are perplexed by the lack of clarity regarding the cause of this tragedy, provide a host of reasons for the deaths of Nadav and Abihu. Perhaps, say the rabbis, the boys were among those who, after the revelation at Sinai, were arrogant and irreverent on the mountain (Exodus 24:11). Perhaps, it was because they brought a strange fire, not from the altar. Could it be that instead of using the vessels of the Tabernacle (as suggested by the language of the verse), they brought their own fire pans? The Midrash Rabbah (Leviticus 20:10), suggests that the sin of Nadav and Abihu was that they refused to marry and have children because they felt that no woman was good enough for them. The Talmud, Sanhedrin 52a, states that Nadav and Abihu showed a lack of respect for Moses and Aaron, even saying publicly: “When will these old fellows die, so that we may take control of the community?”

Other commentators disagree, arguing strongly that there is no evidence to support the claim that Nadav and Abihu were sinful. To the contrary, they claim that Nadav and Abihu were exceedingly righteous. The Midrash Tanchuma (Leviticus 6:6), maintains that the fact that the Torah emphasizes that they brought an אֵשׁ זָרָה , a strange fire, indicates that they might have been misguided only in this one matter, but otherwise they were entirely pure, and guilty of nothing else. Other commentators say that though they used the wrong means to bring the Divine Presence into the Tabernacle, their motives were noble, and inspired by love and joy. Even their punishment implies that they had attained a high spiritual level. That is why G-d slew them with a pure fire, their clothes remaining intact. In fact, suggest the rabbis, the Al-mighty grieved over Nadav and Abihu more than their own father, Aaron.

Whatever the reason for the deaths of the two young men, the juxtaposition of Leviticus 10:8-11 concerning priests not drinking intoxicants before they perform the service in the Temple, establishes the prohibition of drinking at the forefront of the reasons for the deaths of Nadav and Abihu. While on duty, intoxicants are strictly prohibited.

The severe punishment meted out to the sons of Aaron leaves us with compelling reason to carefully study the Jewish attitude toward intoxicants and drugs. In Numbers 6, the Bible teaches about Nazarites, people who dedicate themselves to G-d by refusing to cut their hair, not coming in contact with the dead, and abstaining from drinking wine. The mighty Samson and the Prophet Samuel, were two of the most noted Nazarites.

The case of the Nazarite is the only case in the Bible where drinking is prohibited. Otherwise, drinking is considered normal and proper in Jewish life. In fact, the Psalmist writes in Psalm 104:15: וַיִּין יְשַׂמְחֵה לֵב אָדָם , that wine cheers the hearts of men.

Wine, of course, plays a key role in the rituals of Judaism. Wine is used in the sanctification of the Sabbath and the Holiday Kiddush, at Havdalah—the closing Shabbat and holiday service, and, of course, during the marriage ceremony.

Studies of Jewish intoxication indicate that Jews drink about as much as non-Jews, and are subject to the same vagaries as all drinkers of intoxicants in the United States. What is unusual, is that the studies indicate that those who are involved in Jewish life on a regular basis, those who adopt the traditional customs and rituals associated with Jewish tradition, are not subject to intoxication to the same extent as those who have abandoned tradition. For the traditionalists, a moderate amount of wine is drunk at Kiddush both on Friday night and Saturday morning. Hence, wine never becomes “forbidden fruit,” and is therefore drunk in moderation in most Jewish homes that observe these traditional rituals. Among secular Jews, however, who have given up the value system associated with traditional customs, the incidence of alcohol abuse is more common.

A paraphrase of the German quip, “Wie est sich christelt, so judelt sich”—as the Christians do—so do the Jews, very well describes the current Jewish community’s situation with respect to alcohol and drug abuse. Jews are subject to the same blandishments and temptations of the general populace, and abuse of alcohol and drugs is clearly on the

rise. The fact that in the Jewish community, traditional Jews don't hide or forbid intoxicants from their children, but instead teach them about it in a socially acceptable way, has proven to be quite effective. A good example of this is that on the festive holiday of Purim, which was observed last month, the Talmud (Megillah 7b) states that a person is required to drink *עדן לך עדן*, until he doesn't know the difference between Haman and Mordechai. But, we may not drink beyond the point where we are no longer capable of discerning the difference between Haman and Mordechai.

Alcoholism and drug abuse are serious business. They are not something that can be ignored. The Jewish community needs to make certain that our Sabbaths, festivals and celebrations are not marred by unacceptable practices of wanton drinking. Wine is a divine gift, and plays a key role in Judaism. We need to make sure that it is treated with respect, and used as a special gift.

May you be blessed.

- Just Say Treif!

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Dvar Torah Shemini: The surprising value of self-doubt

If you think that you're not good enough, perhaps that's the very reason why you're the best person for the job. We learn this from Parshat Shemini. Hashem had elected Aharon to become the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest of our nation. All future kohanim, priests, would be descended from him to this day.

Hesitation

The people gathered around the tabernacle in the wilderness for a ceremony with him which Aharon was to be inducted into high office. Everything was ready for the occasion, but there was hesitation. Moshe needed to say to his brother,

"Krav el hamizbeach," – "Approach the altar," as if to suggest, "What are you waiting for?"

Rashi quotes the Torat Kohanim which explains that Aharon was hesitating because he was a man filled with fear of Hashem. He had deep humility and he feared that something might go wrong. He appreciated the enormous responsibility that he had. Moshe reassured him by stating,

"Lechach nivcharta," – "It is for this reason that you've been chosen. Come forward."

The Sefer Panim Yafot explains that, "Lechach nivcharta," those words of Moshe to Aharon, should be translated as, "It's because of this that you've been chosen." It's because you have great emunah, faith in Hashem, such deep humility – because you're nervous that something might go wrong. That's why you're the best person for this task.

Responsibility

In the mid-19th century, Reb Yosroel Salanter was the rabbi of the Vilna Jewish Community. A man from a neighbouring town came to see him to be tested to become the shochet of that town. He did wonderfully well throughout the test but before Reb Yisroel actually gave him the result the man stopped him and said,

"You know, Reb Yisroel, I don't think I should become the shochet. I'll go home now."

Surprised, Reb Yisroel said, what do you mean?"

The man explained, "Well, you know, the responsibility is enormous! Every single member of the community will be relying on me for the kashrut of their kitchens, for every morsel of food that will be upon their plate! I'm nervous that I could make mistakes!"

Reb Yisroel smiled as he said, "You've just proved to me that there could be no shochet better than you for this task. We don't want shoachim who are filled with arrogance, who don't believe that anything can ever go wrong, to be responsible for our food. Rather we want those who appreciate that they need to prove to the communities that they deserve the faith that has been put in them."

That's exactly what Moshe said to Aharon. Your sense of responsibility proves that there could be no leader better than you. Let each and every one of us remember that lesson with regard to the jobs, the vocations and

the professions that we have. Arrogance can, God forbid, drive us to failure but if we constantly go the extra mile filled with nervousness knowing that we need to show that we deserve the trust that has been placed in us, that will certainly contribute towards our success.

Shabbat shalom.

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

Drasha Parshas Shemini - Just Say Treif!

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

In teaching us the kosher laws this week, the Torah deviates from a meritorious procedure.

Normally the Torah hardly elaborates unnecessarily, yet Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi tells us in Tractate Pesachim that in Parshas Noach the Torah deviated from its normal propensity to abbreviate. In fact, it added eight letters for a very special reason. Rabbi Yehoshua explains, "A person should never emit a harsh expression from his mouth, that is why in Parshas Noach when the Torah tells us that Noach animals into his ark it takes pain to add letters." The Torah tells us that "Noach took sets of seven males and females of each the tahir (kosher) animal species, and a set of two animals non-tahir (kosher) species" (Genesis 7:8-9).

"The Torah," continues Rabbi Yehoshua, "could have just said one simple word to describe the non-kosher animals – tamei! (treif). Yet to teach us the importance of clean speech it uses an elaborate Hebrew terminology, animals that are not kosher, instead of a simpler and shorter expression, treif animals. The Torah avoids calling creatures, even non-kosher ones, tamei (impure) rather it labels them as 'animals that are not classified as tahir.'"

This week however, the Torah is not as tempered. In Parshas Shmini, the Torah prescribes the laws of kosher and non-kosher. It specifies for us those signs and characteristics of kosher animals. Those who do not meet the specifications are deemed tamei (non-kosher). Among those classified as non-kosher are hare, the camel, the hyrax, and of course, the pig. The Torah refers to these animals as tamei! It waives the graciousness it displays in Parshas Noach. It does not label them as "animals that are not tahir. It calls them treif! Why the curt classification? What happened to the gentle etiquette so beautifully professed by Rabbi Yehoshua?

The governor of a group of small villages decided to make an official visit to one of the more backward farm communities of his province. The mayor of the village, a simple farmer who had no idea of neither social graces, nor etiquette received him. The farmer's wife made tea, the water of which was scooped from a muddy stream and set to boil. Upon sipping the first bit of the dirt-filled libation, the governor immediately spit it out and shouted, "What did you serve me? This is terrible!" The governor proceeded to show the mayor and his wife exactly how to strain water through cheese-cloth in order to make a proper glass of tea. Amazed, both husband and wife accepted the advice gratefully.

A few weeks later, there was a fire in the village. Reports to the governor said that though there had been ample water, manpower, and time to contain the blaze, for some reason the fire had managed to destroy most of the town. The governor arrived at the home of the mayor to inquire what, exactly, went wrong.

"You see, dear governor," beamed the hapless mayor, "the men were going to use the muddy brook-water to extinguish the blaze, but I stopped them! I showed them how to filter the water, and remove the small rocks and dirt. Since your visit, we never used filthy water again!" "You fool!" shouted the governor. "You filter for tea, not a fire! When a fire is raging you must put it out immediately – even with dirty water!"

The story of Noach is a narrative. The Torah can well afford to classify the non-kosher animals in a positive light. After all, for the sake of the story it does not make a difference if the animals are referred to as tamei, or not tahir. The Torah chose the gentler way. However when telling us to avoid eating animals which are not kosher, the Torah does not offer circuitous etiquette, it declares boldly – "they are traif!"

We live in a world that is wrought with many dangers. Sometimes we must say, “no,” to our friends, our children, and ourselves, in a very curt and abrupt way. A particular action, behavior, or influence, may be much worse than “not-so-good.” They may be traif, and must simply be stated as such. Saying “no” may lack class, but it may work.

There is a time and place for every expression. When etiquette will work, it must be used; but when a fire is burning, and the situation demands powerful exhortation, any water, even if it is a little muddy, must be used!

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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

A Life of Holiness and Purity

Sefer Vayikra begins with the halachos of korbanos, specifically Parshas Vayikra and the beginning of Tzav elaborate on the korbanos themselves. Tzav then concludes, and parshas Shemini begins, with the application of these laws as the dedication of the Mishkan is completed. Sefer Vayikra then continues with a seemingly different focus; the second half of Parshas Shemini discusses the halachos of tumah and taharah. The laws of kashrus are connected to this area of halacha and are therefore presented in the overall context of these laws as well. Ritual impurity of food, vessels, and the institution of the mikvah to purify people and vessels conclude Parshas Shemini. Continuing with this theme, Parshas Tazria and Metzora deal at great length with the intricacies of a person becoming impure in various ways. The relevance of the laws of tumah and taharah in Sefer Vayikra, which is primarily dedicated to laws governing the Mishkan and later the Beis HaMikdash, seems obvious, since from a halachic perspective that the laws of impurity are most significant in the context of the Mishkan and korbanos. Sacrifices that become impure are disqualified and individuals who are impure may not come to the Mishkan. Perhaps, however, there is another message that the Torah is hinting at by placing the laws of purity and impurity in the context of the korbanos.

The Rambam teaches us that the rules that govern korbanos as well as tumah and taharah are fundamentally part of the category of mitzvos known as chukim. The chukim have no apparent reason that is comprehensible to man. Even though the ultimate reason for the chukim are only known to Hashem, the Rambam suggests that there are lessons that we can derive from the symbolism of these otherwise incomprehensible mitzvos. Following this approach, perhaps the relationship between korbanos and tumah can teach a lesson that is relevant to us.

Kedusha is the defining feature of all korbanos. Korbanos are offered by a sanctified individual, a Kohen, in a holy place, the Beis HaMikdash. The eating of all korbanos is governed by kedushas z'man and kedushas Makom, sanctity of time and sanctity of place. The category of korbanos known as kodshei kodoshim are even holier than kodshim kalim and are bound by stricter rules of holiness of time and place. Offering and partaking of a korban is an experience of kedusha, and all kedusha emanates from Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself. We are commanded to be holy because Hashem is holy. Eating korbanos is described by Chazal as eating from the table of Hashem. It is precisely korbanos being so holy that requires them to be free of all impurity. Neither the Kohen who offers them, nor the Yisrael who eats them, can be impure. If the meat of a korban comes into contact with something impure, it must be burned. Experiencing Hashem as we involve ourselves in a holy activity cannot occur in a state of impurity.

This concept speaks to us even outside the realm of korbanos. We seek holiness as we connect to Hashem in many ways. The words of Torah study are holy and our mitzvah performance is referred to as "kidshanu b'mitzvosov", we are sanctified by His mitzvos. Our tefillos correspond to korbanos and our shuls are described by Chazal as miniature batei mikdash. Shabbos and yom tov are times of kedushas zman, and each such time begins with the recitation of Kiddush. All of these moments of spending time with Hashem, the ultimate source of kedusha, can only be

experienced properly if they are devoid of tumah. Purity of thought, speech, and action are critical for a life of kedusha. Chazal teach us that one who wants to purify oneself will be assisted by Hashem in doing so. May we all merit that special assistance as we grow in our kedusha.

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Shmini: Ritual distancing

Ben-Tzion Spitz

Distance has the same effect on the mind as on the eye. - Samuel Johnson

The Torah provides a substantial amount of detail regarding the laws of what animals we're allowed to eat as well as those we are commanded to stay far away from. No insects or shellfish are allowed. The only seafood we're allowed is those fish that have scales and fins.

The Torah also gives a long list of all the birds we're not allowed to eat. The number of kosher birds we can partake of is relatively limited and are exclusively non-predatory.

In the mammal category, there is the general guideline of only being allowed to eat animals who both chew their cud and have split hooves. Beyond that general guideline, the Torah also specifies mammals who have one or the other of those attributes which are not kosher. Having split hooves or chewing its cud is not enough; the animal is only kosher if it has both attributes. The prime and notorious example of a non-kosher mammal is the pig, which even though it has split hooves, it doesn't chew its cud.

The verse immediately after the one that singles out the pig and its other non-kosher mammal friends states that not only should you not eat these animals, but you shouldn't even touch their carcass.

The Bechor Shor on the verse (Leviticus 11:8) wonders about the seeming redundancy. If you're not allowed to even touch the dead meat, then how would one come to eat it?

He explains that while the prohibition regarding non-kosher food is quite strict, the statement regarding not touching the non-kosher item is just some good advice and not a legal obligation according to Jewish law.

He elaborates that there is something intrinsically filthy and disgusting about non-kosher food that even touching it could somehow contaminate us. It possesses an impurity and foulness that can somehow be conveyed not only into our bodies but to our very souls. However, if one were to find a dead carcass of non-kosher meat in one's home, one would be obliged to remove it, even though it would entail touching it. The slight contact with the contaminating food in order to remove it is justified in comparison to keeping the putrid item in your home.

May we always remain far away from items that may contaminate us and only partake of clean, healthful food.

Dedication - To the opening up of venues in general, and Yeshiva in particular.

Shabbat Shalom

Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Parashat Shmini - 5781

Purity of the Soul, Restraint, and Humility

Large sections of the book of Leviticus, which we are in the midst of reading now, deal with laws pertaining to the Temple and to the roles of the kohanim (priests). Other sections of the book detail the laws of purity and impurity which are also largely irrelevant for a time when the Temple is not standing. However, in this week's parasha of Shmini, we read a detailed section that is relevant to every Jew throughout time: the laws of kashrut. The Torah specifies the signs upon which we can recognize which animal, fish, or fowl we are allowed to eat and which is forbidden.

Kashrut is a significant part of Jewish identity. The basic principle of kashrut is that what a person puts into his body affects not only his physical health but the purity of his soul as well. For thousands of years, humanity has been aware that the food we eat impacts our body's health. As science has evolved, there has been an ever-increasing awareness of

the specific influences of various foods on our bodies. However, the effect of food on the purity of our souls is a Jewish innovation. This is not scientific knowledge, but knowledge passed down via tradition from a divine source, and as a result it has become characteristic of a Jew loyal to Jewish tradition.

In the past, foods were simpler and were composed of familiar ingredients. It was easy to know if a certain food was kosher or not. As the food industry developed, it became more and more complicated to know if a food item, which could be made of tens or even hundreds of ingredients, was kosher and permissible. For this reason, there are kashrut networks around the world that operate supervision from the production of basic ingredients to the preparation of the products. This made it possible for any Jew to know if any given product is kosher or not.

Other than the benefit in preserving the purity of the soul by observing kashrut, there is an additional, very significant benefit. A Jew who pays attention to the kashrut of food is exercising restraint and self-control on a daily basis.

We are all aware of the abundance and availability in our world over these past few decades. But such abundance also creates a challenge to our self-control and to our ability to delay gratification. As our world advances in industry and technology, we also see an increased challenge to our ability to restrain ourselves and withstand attraction or strong desire. The solution is repeatedly practicing restraint and delay of needs satisfaction. Every Jew who keeps kosher is practicing this daily, often several times a day. By paying attention to what is or isn't kosher, we become more stable, responsible, and deliberate.

Kashrut also sets limits on human control over the environment. We are used to controlling what surrounds us. Is there any product not available for sale? If, in the past, there were products available only in a certain country, nowadays, a person can order anything from anywhere in the world with a few simple keystrokes and have it delivered within days. We feel like we can control what exists around us, and correlated with that, our egos swell, consideration of others gets trampled, ecology gets destroyed, and we attain a sense of ownership over reality. And we hunger for more.

On the other hand, a person who keeps kosher knows: I cannot eat this food item, or drink this drink. He gets constant reminders of the fact that he is not the owner of reality. It is a reminder of humility in the face of creation. A person is welcome to use and enjoy his environment, but he does not control it.

And lastly, kashrut requires us to remember the profound difference between us and living creatures: moral insight, conscience, and choice. As opposed to animals, man can restrain his attraction and obey the divine command that forbids him from eating certain foods. This is the glory of man and his greatness.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

Rav Kook Torah

Shemini: The Priestly Benediction

Chanan Morrison

The Tabernacle inauguration concluded with a blessing from the High Priest:

“Aaron lifted his hands towards the people and blessed them. He then descended from preparing the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the peace offerings.” (Lev. 9:22)

When Was the Blessing Recited?

From the Torah's account, it would seem that Aaron blessed the people before he completed the service in the newly dedicated Tabernacle. The Sages, however, explained that the actual order was different. First, Aaron completed the offerings and descended from the altar. Only afterwards did he bless the people (Torat kohanim, Megillah 18a).

If the priestly benediction was performed at the end of the Temple service (which nowadays is recited at the end of the Amidah prayer), why does the Torah imply a different order?

The True Honor of kohanim

When discussing the contribution of the kohanim to the Jewish people, and the corresponding honor they receive, we must distinguish between their current state and their future potential.

We may respect an individual kohen for his scholarship and piety, but the true honor we bestow to kohanim is in recognition of their holy influence over the entire nation. We honor them primarily for their future potential, for what a kohen should and can be — “for he is an emissary of God of the hosts” (Malachi 2:7). Even if the kohen is undeserving of such honor in his present state, “You must strive to keep him holy... he will be holy for you, since I am holy” (Lev. 21:8). His holiness is due to his potential benefit to the nation, as a member of the sanctified family.

(This, by the way, is similar to the honor we give to rabbis and teachers. We respect them for their erudition and also as representatives of the institution of the rabbinate. This honor is in recognition of the overall contribution of the rabbinate to the welfare of the people. The rabbi on his part should realize that he is primarily honored for what he ought to be, and should do his best to fulfill this expectation.)

Two Roles of the Priesthood

The function of the kohanim is not only to serve in the Temple. The kohanim are also expected to teach and elevate the people, as it says, “From the kohen's lips they will guard knowledge, and they will seek Torah from his mouth” (Malachi 2:7). These two roles are interrelated, since the source for their spiritual influence on the people originates in the holiness of their service in the Temple.

There is one duty of the kohanim that combines both of these roles: the priestly blessing. This blessing is part of the Temple service, and at the same time, reflects their interaction with the people. The kohen recite the blessing with outstretched arms, a sign that their efforts to uplift the people are an extension and continuation of their holy service in the Temple.

Bridging the Past and the Future

The blessing also forms a bridge over time, connecting the past with the future and the actualized with the potential.

The kohen can best fulfill their mission to uplift the people after they have participated in the Temple service and experienced the unique elevation of soul gained through this holy public service. Their blessing will then reflect the highest level of influence and inspiration the kohen is able to impart. Thus, the blessing indicates the present state of the kohen, while being based on his past service, and extending — like his outstretched arms — to his future potential influence.

Now we can resolve the apparent contradiction between the Torah's account and actual practice. The text implies that the kohanim complete their service after blessing the people. The service referred to here is not their service in the Temple, but their role in uplifting the people, which is truly their primary mission. In practice, however, the priestly blessing needs to be based on the holy services that they have already performed. Therefore, it is recited only after they have completed their service in the Temple.

The Impact of Prayer

A similar phenomenon is found at the end of the Amidah prayer, when we say, “May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be acceptable before You” (Psalms 19:15).

It would appear more logical to recite this plea before praying. In fact, the verse does not refer to the prayer about to be recited, but to our heartfelt aspiration that we should be able to apply the influence of this prayer on the coming day. Like the priestly benediction, this request forms a bridge between two states. It is based on the prayer service just performed, but it looks forward to the future influence of this spiritual elevation on our lives.

(Gold from the Land of Israel pp. 187-189. Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. I, pp. 284-285; Otzerot HaRe'iyah vol. II, pp. 211-212)

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Shemini

פרשת שמ׳ני תשפ״א

ויקחו בני אהרן נדב ואביהוא איש מחתרתו

The sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, each took his fire pan. (10:1)

Yalkut Shemoni (Shemini, Remez 524) adds that each one – Nadav and Avihu – took his fire pan, *mei'atzmo*, on his own, neither discussing it with – nor accepting advice from – his brother. The two brothers erred in thinking that it was a *mitzvah* to offer on their own without first receiving a Divine mandate. It makes sense to assume that their error was extremely minute, as they were such righteous individuals. They certainly did not arrive at their individual decisions without intense cogitation. Clearly, they thought the matter through and rendered their individual decisions. Nonetheless, the *Yalkut* implies, that had they talked it over together and sought each other's advice, things might have been different. Why is this? They both arrived at the same decision independently of one another. Would a conversation between them have changed the result?

Horav A. Henschel Leibowitz, zl, derives from here that even if both autonomously felt that this was the correct approach, had they sought the other's advice, they would have arrived at the truth – which they did not by going at it alone. This is human nature; once one expresses his opinion to another person, he is apt to review and deliberate with greater depth and clarity, thus arriving at the truth.

Seeking and giving advice are central to effective leadership and decision-making. People misgauge in thinking that pursuing advice, talking it over with someone, is a weakness that indicates passivity on the part of the guidance seeker. On the contrary, it demonstrates that one is concerned about developing the best possible solution and that he is open to feedback from others. He understands that others might have a new or different take on the matter, which can add nuance and texture to his line of thinking.

One must overcome hurdles, of which first and foremost is an ingrained tendency to prefer one's own opinion – irrespective of its merit. To seek advice requires greatness, restraint, dignity and strong self-esteem, which are commodities not easily acquired. One who seeks advice must overcome his self-imposed notion that he already has all the answers. Over-confidence leads to solo decision-making which can be misguided by one's delusory thinking. Some who ask for help have already made up their minds, but only seek validation and encouragement – not advice. It is difficult to advise someone who does not sincerely want your assistance.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* quotes from *Pirkei Avos* (6:6) where *Chazal* detail the forty-eight *kinyanei haTorah*, ways to acquire Torah, among which is included *dikduk chaverim*, precision/analysis with fellow students. We normally understand *dikduk chaverim* as an opportunity to correct one's mistakes, or to better one's logic by listening to what the other fellow has to say. It goes much further than this. When one reviews his thoughts, so that his friend hears what he has to say, he delves deeper into the logic. By plumbing its depths, he will arrive at the truth. In other words, the mere fact that he must present his thoughts to his fellow serves as a catalyst for him to review and question his original reasoning until he arrives at the truth.

Furthermore, the mind grows from social interaction. Reason and intelligence develop and grow the more people interface with one another. One who spends his youth alone, without even the stimulating effect of parents, will grow up staring at the world through a fog of dull indifference. When one spends time with others, he has access to precise knowledge concerning everything that he learns. Otherwise, he is not in the loop. Others will not listen to an individual whose mind is not stimulated, because he very likely has nothing much to offer.

In his commentary to *Pirkei Avos*, *Maharal* adds that when a person learns by himself, his mind remains imbedded within his body. Only when he teams with another person does his mind extend beyond himself, to the point that it enables him to have a purer connection to the Torah.

Last, when one presents his thoughts to another person, he learns to deal with opposition. When Reuven prepares his thesis to be read by Shimon, he will make sure to address whatever question Shimon may have – thus solidifying and strengthening his presentation. This is especially true if the presenter has a different perspective than his audience. Life is not a bed of roses, and we often have to deal with

people and situations which test our patience and acumen. Life is filled with contradictions and incongruities. When we feel that our opinion is founded and rooted in analytic bedrock, however, the product of precise analysis and cogency that has been reviewed from all angles, we feel confident and sure. When we preempt every question that might be posed to us, we cover every negative ramification that might result from our decision. There is no question that Nadav and Avihu were the most distinguished and holy upcoming leaders of *Klal Yisrael*. Their thoughts regarding the offering they brought had merit in their eyes, only because they were not compelled to present their opinion for scrutiny. Had each one individually known that his opinion would be scrutinized, he might have thought twice before acting on his own.

וימתו לפני ד'

And they died before Hashem. (10:2)

When a person renders a decision, he must take into consideration its effect on others, as well as all the ramifications, direct and indirect, present and future, that will result from his decision. Nadav and Avihu did not marry. *Chazal (Midrash Rabbah, Vayikra 20:10)* consider them guilty of haughtiness for not marrying. They would say, "Our father is the High Priest;" "Our father's brother is the king/leader of the nation;" "Our uncle is the *Nasi*, Prince of the tribe of Yehudah." "We are next in line for the hierarchy of the Priesthood. Is there a woman that is suitable for/worthy of us?" As a result of their decision not to marry, many women remained *agunos*, unmarried, in the individual hope that she might be the lucky girl who marries one of them. According to the *Midrash*, Nadav and Avihu were held responsible for having catalyzed an increase in the number of unmarried women. This must be qualified. Why should they be blamed for what might be considered a ludicrous act on the part of the women?

Horav A. Henschel Leibowitz, zl, derives from here that a person will have to answer for the fallout of his actions. We do not live in a vacuum. Our society is close and people often render decisions which affect many lives based upon their actions. Nadav and Avihu made a personal decision concerning their own lives. Why should they be faulted? Obviously, the previous sentence is wrong. They did not have personal lives. As *gedolei Yisrael*, their lives touched upon the lives of others. Their decisions affected others. As long as someone – regardless of how wrong he is – is somehow hurt by my decision, I am held responsible. I cannot simply say, "Who cares what he does? I did not tell him to act so foolishly." If my actions impact another person, I must think twice before I act.

Interestingly, *Chazal* attribute other laxes in spiritual perfection to Nadav and Avihu, infractions that, on the surface, would suggest greater reason for punishment than catalyzing a woman's self-imposed *agunah* status. Apparently, their actions bespoke a vestige of haughtiness on their part. Also, by not marrying, they were being *mevatel*, abrogating, the *mitzvah* of *pru' urvu*, be fruitful and multiply. Those are serious reasons for censure. Yet, they died because they were (unknowingly) the cause of women not marrying. Apparently, we have no idea the pain a woman who is unable to marry experiences. This is true, regardless of whether she has yet to meet her Heavenly-designated match, or she is the innocent victim of a recalcitrant husband who is more concerned with assuaging his dominant ego at the expense of his wife than with the pain he causes to her and their children. Causing a fellow Jew to feel pain, to suffer emotional distress, is a terrible sin which Hashem does not forgive.

This might not be the proper venue to remonstrate about the plight of *agunos*. When it involves Jewish pain, however, no concept of not being the right venue exists. Very few understand the plight of an *agunah*, chained wife, who is unable to continue with life because she is chained to a marriage that, for all intents and purposes, no longer exists, other than in the mind of her intractable husband and the few sick supporters he can garner. The *agunah* suffers; her children, who are the ransom in her captivity, and her family must look on, chin up, and not engage in what is not their affair. Yet, they must look on as their child withers away before their very eyes. The only hope that keeps them all going forward is the knowledge that Hashem feels her/their pain and He

is with her/them every day. He has a plan, and we are all part of it. We must be patient as Hashem allows the plan to play itself out.

Some people – very special people – have hearts that are so huge that they can encompass our pain, people such as *Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl*. He understood and was sensitive to the struggle of the *agunah*. It was during the Six Day War, and Yerushalayim was being shelled. The *Mir Yeshivah*, and people from all over the *Bais Yisrael* neighborhood in which the *yeshivah* is located, took cover in the *yeshivah's* air raid shelter. Jordan kept on shelling, while the *yeshivah* continued learning and *davening*. The shells executed a direct hit against the *yeshivah*. At that moment, the shouts of *Shema Yisrael* could be heard loud and clear. It was precisely at that moment, as everyone's anxiety level peaked, that a woman whose husband had abandoned her years earlier, leaving her an *agunah* with no livelihood and no hope, cried out to Hashem, "*Ribono Shel Olam*, I forgive my husband. I forgive the indignity and humiliation he put me through. I forgive him all the great pain to which he subjected me all of these years. I ask that You, too, forgive us for whatever failures we have."

Rav Chaim, who was in that room together with his *talmidim*, students, explained that it was the *agunah's* plea that superseded even the passionate *tefillos*, prayers and their powerful recital of *Shema Yisrael*. The passionate forgiveness of a woman who was so miserably rejected, yet she was able to be *mevater*, concede and give in, when she had every reason not to, catalyzed the salvation of the *Yeshivah*. Hashem listened to her, and they were all saved.

אך את זה לא תאכלו ... את הגמל כי מעלה גרה הוא ופרסה איננו מפריס ... ואת השפן כי מעלה גרה הוא ופרסה לא יפריס ... ואת הארנבת כי מעלת גרה היא ופרסה לא הפרסה טמאה היא לכם

But this is what you shall not eat... the camel (for it brings up its cud), but its hoof is not split ... and the hyrax, for it brings up its cud, but its hoof is not split... and the hare, for it brings up its cud, but its hoof is not split. It is unclean to you. (11:4,5,6)

The Torah teaches us that an animal achieves kosher status when it possesses two identifying signs/characteristics: split hooves; and chews/brings up its cud. We are taught that three animals, the camel, hyrax and hare, chew their cud, but, since they do not have split hooves, they are deemed unkosher. In his *Nitzotzos*, *Horav Yitzchak Hershkowitz, Shlita*, observes what appears to be an anomaly in recording the three circumstances of a lack of split hooves. In animal number one, the camel, the Torah writes, *uparsah einenah mafris*, which loosely translated means, it presently does not have split hooves. The next animal, the hyrax, is described by the Torah, *u'parsah lo yafris*, which means, it will not have split hooves. The last animal, the hare, is portrayed as, *u'parshah lo hifrisah*, it did not have split hooves – in the past tense. Why does the Torah vary its characterization of the unkosher aspect of the animal in three tenses? It could have just as well delineated the reason in one tense.

Rav Hershkowitz suggests a homiletic rendering of these *pesukim* which implies an inspirational lesson concerning how we should view and judge people. *Chazal* teach, *Hevei dan es kol ha'adam l'kaf z'chus*; "Judge every person favorably." Give everyone the benefit of the doubt. A common variation of this maxim is, "Judge not a person until you have walked (a mile) in his shoes." We never really understand a person until we consider things from his vantage point, from his point of view, based upon what he has experienced in life.

What is the meaning of *kol ha'adam* – every person, or all of the person? The accepted understanding of this phrase is, every person has a past; he lives in the present, and, with Hashem's blessing, he will have a future. When we are about to judge someone, do not judge him solely on his past actions or his present demeanor. Every person (hopefully) has a future. He might change. Circumstances in his life might be altered to the point that his future now appears bright and hopeful. Every person has a moment/period/stage in life in which he does not meritoriously judge the whole person – past, present and future. As the *Maharal* puts it: Only Hashem is able to judge the whole person. Only Hashem knows every person's good and bad deeds – and their motivations and provocations. Many people have seriously erred in life,

made poor choices. These same people could really be good people who sadly became victims of others due to circumstances beyond their control, or fell in with the wrong people. Prior to judging them and writing them off (which is sadly so common), remember that we have a concept of *kol ha'adam*, all of the person. Hashem is the only One Who can judge any person in the context of his whole life, thus acknowledging the good and bad that comprise his life.

We now return to the three *pesukim* which present the lack of split hooves in three frames: past, present and future. The Torah is teaching us that before we render the *siman tumah*, sign of ritual impurity, we must be certain that it was impure, is impure and (for all intents and purposes, based upon what we see now), it will continue in its impurity, with no redeeming value. Only then does the Torah agree to refer to this creature as *tamei*.

I came across an interesting idea which will alert us to something which I think most (all) of us are guilty. A teacher conducted an experiment with his class. He held up a white paper plate in which he had placed a small black dot. He then asked the students to describe to him what they saw. The first student said he saw a black spot. Another student asserted it was a target for shooting practice. A third student said he simply saw a faulty or dirty plate. The teacher looked at the class and asked: "Did not anyone among you see a white plate?"

We have become attuned to looking at (picking out) the black spots. Essentially, this was a large, white plate with a tiny, black spot in the middle. We are so used to looking for the dirt, the negative, the imperfections, that we fail to see the large picture: the white plate. We do this to people at times, even to our own children. We ignore their successes and achievements and, instead, focus on the black dots. We are judgmental and critical, when we should be seeing the good in others. I might add that, veritably, it is impossible to ignore the black dot, but we must remember and reiterate in our minds that it is only one tiny black dot on a large white plate, and it is only because the plate/background is so white that we even notice the black dot.

כי אני ד' אלקיכם והתקדשתם והייתם קדשים

For I am Hashem your G-d, you are to sanctify yourselves and you shall become holy. (11:44)

Ibn Ezra adds to the *pasuk*: "You shall sanctify yourselves because I am Hashem your G-d. I gave you *mitzvos* and statutes to guard (and observe), so that you will maintain your holiness." In other words, the *mitzvos* which we observe protect us. The greater our affiliation with and observance of *mitzvos*, the greater is our protection from failure and falling into the abyss of sin and spiritual contamination. One night, quite late, *Horav Akiva Eiger, zl*, *Rav* of Posen and the preeminent Torah giant of his generation, heard knocking at his door. As *Rav* of the city, the people knew that he was the 24/7 address for every Jew in need. The fact that it was late at night, when most Jews had retired for the night, did not matter. The *Rav* was surely awake. He was always learning. The *Gaon* went to his door to find two women standing there: a mother and her daughter. They stood by the door weeping bitterly.

"What is wrong?" the *Gaon* asked them. "Our father (elderly woman's husband) leased an inn from a gentile landowner. This past winter was outrageously cold and snowy. As a result, people did not go out. Without customers, we have no income; without income, we have no rent money. The problem is: the *poritz*, landowner, accepts no excuses. He demands payment. My father was thrown into the dungeon and given an ultimatum: two days to pay – or else. One day has passed." They then proceeded to continue their incessant weeping.

The *Gaon's* reply was, "Wait here until I return." He called his son, and they both left the house in search of funds to help this poor Jew. *Rav Akiva Eiger* covered half the city, trudging through the frigid snow, braving the biting cold wind, all for the sake of a Jew whom he did not even know. He "chanced" upon a bar (The word is in quotes because, as *frum* Jews, we know that nothing happens by chance. Indeed, the word should not be in our lexicon.). The establishment was packed with men imbibing to their heart's content. Understandably, the patrons of this bar were not the average *shul*-going, *Shabbos* observant members of the Jewish community. The *Gaon* was confronted with a quandary: Should

he enter the establishment and plead with them, attempting to appeal to their *Yiddishe neshamos*, souls, the *pintele Yid* that we each possess? He decided that, since a Jew's life was in danger, he would take his chances.

Rav Akiva Eiger walked into the bar and placed himself in middle of the room. "*Rabbosai*, I need your help. One of our own is wallowing in a dungeon and, unless I raise the funds to redeem him, he will be tortured, and perhaps worse. Please help. Whoever saves one Jew it is considered as if he sustained the entire world!" Their wallets opened up and, within a few moments, these far from religiously observant Jews produced sufficient funds to save their brother.

The *Gaon* took their money and turned back and began admonishing them concerning their lack of observance. The men were shocked. Their leader spoke up, "First, the *Rav* empties our wallets, and then he has the temerity to give us words of *mussar*, admonishment?"

The *Gaon* replied, "It is my responsibility as *Rav* to see to it that every member of our community (Posen) follows along in the correct and righteous path. You have no idea how much I value and appreciate each and every one of you. I have enormous pain in my heart resulting from your spiritual infamy. You have distanced yourselves from Hashem, and this troubles me." With these words, *Rav Akiva Eiger* burst into bitter, uncontrolled weeping. A few minutes passed, and he added, "When I entered the bar I saw you in your degradation, I was prepared then and there to admonish you for your less than acceptable behavior. Then I recalled the words of *Chazal*, 'Just as it is a *mitzvah* to say what will be heard (and accepted), it is likewise a *mitzvah* not to say what will not be heard (*Yevamos* 65b).' In other words, it is better not to speak/admonish when the subject will, at best, ignore you. We gain nothing by giving *mussar* to someone whom we know will not listen. Indeed, it might enrage him and distance him even further. Now that you all have merited to save a Jewish life, however, I am certain that the light of the *mitzvah* has illuminated and warmed your hearts to the point that it is incumbent upon me to arouse you to return and embrace your religious roots." The words of the *Gaon* had an impact, and a number of those in attendance altered their spiritual trajectory and became observant Jews. This goes to show that, more than what we do for the *mitzvah*, the *mitzvah* does for us.

Va'ani Tefillah

כולנו כאחד באור פניך – All of us together/all of us as one with the light of Your face.

Horav Avigdor Miller, zl, explains that we can have no blessing other than the light of His face, because that is the source of all blessing, both physical and spiritual. He adds that here again the principle of *middah k'neged middah*, measure for measure, comes into play. As much as man shows the light of his face to others, will he be commensurately eligible for the light of Hashem's countenance. To further explain this, I relate a question that the students of the *Alter, zl*, *m'Slabodka* posed to their revered *Rebbe*. *Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl*, was wont to say that an ethical lesson/imperative may be gleaned from everything we learn, regardless whether it is *mussar*, discourse in ethical character refinement, or it is *halachah*, Jewish law.

The students were studying the chapters in the *Talmud Shabbos* dealing with the four *reshuyos*, domains, with regard to carrying on *Shabbos* from one domain to another. They asked what *mussar* lesson can be derived from the domains. The *Alter* replied that each person has a *reshus ha'yachid*, private domain, and *reshus ha'rabim*, public domain. His public domain is his face and the countenance that he projects to others. He must always present a happy, positive, modest face to others, while his private domain, personal customs and traditions, remain private – neither imposing them on or judging others by their agreement with his manner of observance. How we act towards others is the barometer Hashem will use in the manner in which He deals with us

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Lessons of Parshas Shemini
Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Tanner Training

"I work as a leather tanner. Should I train for a different *parnasah*, so that I can make a living after *Moshiach* comes?"

Question #2: Amorphous Amphibians

"What is the difference between a toad and a frog?"

Question #3: Lessons of Parshas Shemini

What does either of the previous two questions have to do with this week's *parshah*?

Introduction:

Since, unfortunately, our *Beis Hamikdash* still lies in ruins, the laws of *tumah* and *taharah* do not affect our daily lives significantly. As a result, many people do not approach the study of these laws enthusiastically, and do not pay adequate attention to the *Torah* readings when they are about this topic. Yet, our prayers for *Moshiach* to come at any moment require us to be fully knowledgeable of the laws of *tumah* and *taharah*, so that we are prepared to observe them. As the *Gemara* teaches, in the days of *Chizkiyahu Hamelech*, they searched the entire Land of Israel, from the northern to the southern tip, and could not find a single man, woman or child who was not completely conversant in every detail of the laws of *tumah* and *taharah* (*Sanhedrin* 94b). The situation should be similar today or even better, since we have a responsibility to comprehend the weekly *parshah*, and some of these laws are discussed in *parshas Shemini*.

Some *tumah* basics

Someone who becomes *tamei* may not enter the *Beis Hamikdash* or consume *terumah*, *ma'aser sheini*, *bikkurim* or *kodoshim*, foods that have sanctity.

The following passage of this week's *parshah* mentions eleven different categories of the laws of *tumah*, which are numbered in the selection below to facilitate explaining them afterward. The *Torah* writes:

Among animals that walk on all fours (1), anything that walks upon its forepaws* is impure (*tamei*). Whoever touches the carcass of such an animal will be *tamei* until evening. And whoever carries their carcass must wash his clothes, and he is *tamei* until evening, because these animals are *tamei* for you.

And the following creatures that creep on the ground (2) are *tamei* for you: The weasel,** the mouse, and the various species of toad. Also the hedgehog, the *ko'ach*,*** the lizard, the snail and the mole. These are *tamei* to you, among all the creeping animals – whoever touches them after they are dead will be *tamei* until evening. And anything that falls upon them after they are dead will become *tamei*, whether it is a wooden vessel (3) or a garment (4) or leather (5) or sackcloth (6) – any vessel with which work is performed (7). It must be immersed in water, and then it remains *tamei* until evening, at which point it becomes *tahor*.

Furthermore, any part of them (that is, the eight *tamei* "creeping creatures") that will fall inside any earthenware vessel (8), whatever is inside it will become *tamei*, and you shall break it (that is, the earthenware vessel). And any edible food (9) that had water touch it can become *tamei*. Similarly, any liquid (10) that can be drunk will become *tamei*, if inside such a vessel. Furthermore, anything on which part of a carcass falls will become *tamei*. An oven or stove (11) should be destroyed, because they are *tamei*, and when you use them, they will be *tamei* (*Vayikra* 11:27-35).

The *Torah* describes many different types of *tumah* (spiritual contamination), each with its own laws. Every word used in this passage has a very specific meaning. Let us explore some of the laws of the different categories mentioned.

(1) *Neveilah*

When discussing someone who touched a non-shechted animal carcass (*neveilah*), the *Torah* specifies that a person becomes *tamei* whether he touched it or carried it, but notes a *halachic* difference between a *neveilah* that was touched and one that was carried. Regarding carrying the carcass, which creates a status called *tumas masa*, the *Torah* says that he must wash his clothes, but omits this detail regarding one who touches the carcass, which is called *tumas maga*. We see here a difference in *halachah* between the person who carries a *neveilah* and one who touches it without moving it. One who carries a *neveilah*

contaminates any utensils, food or beverage susceptible to tumah that he touches while he carries it. The clothes that he wears are used by the Torah as an example of any item that he touches while carrying or moving the neveilah. This tumah is called tumah be'chiburin, meaning tumah by connection. Any keilim, utensils or appliances that now become tamei will require immersion in a mikveh or spring, and then will become tahor again at the subsequent nightfall. (There is one type of utensil that is not affected by tumah be'chiburin – earthenware vessels that were touched by a person while he carried a neveilah remain tahor. Also, tumah be'chiburin of neveilah does not contaminate people – therefore, someone touching the person who is carrying the neveilah remains tahor.) However, someone who touches a neveilah without causing it to move does not contaminate something else he touches at the same time. While he himself becomes tamei and remains tamei until he immerses in a mikveh or spring and waits until nightfall, what he touches at the time remains tahor.

Tanner training

At this point, let us examine our first opening question:

“I work as a leather tanner. Should I train for a different parnasah, so that I can make a living after Moshiach comes?”

The questioner realizes that someone who tans leather will make himself tamei if he handles the carcasses of animals. However, once the flesh is removed, the hide itself is not considered neveilah and does not generate tumah (see Mishnah Chullin 117b). Even should our questioner handle neveilos, he can make himself tahor through immersion in a mikveh. It is, indeed, true that he may not enter the Beis Hamikdash or consume terumah, ma'aser sheini, bikkurim or kodoshim while he is tamei, but this does not preclude his earning his livelihood in this way.

(2) Sheretz

The Torah lists eight creeping creatures that generate tumah if one touches them after they are dead. As the Ibn Ezra already notes, we are uncertain as to the exact identity of these eight creatures. When Eliyahu arrives, he will teach us their proper identifications, so that we can properly observe the laws. According to the translation that I provided above, which is based on Rashi and other traditional commentaries, the eight include an interesting mixture of small mammals (mostly rodents), reptiles, amphibians and mollusks. All usually lie close to the ground, and most are small. However, if the ko'ach is identified correctly as a monitor, it is the largest of the lizards and can grow as long as ten feet.

If our translation is correct, other small creatures – such as snakes, frogs, insects and other rodents – are not included under the heading of tamei sheratzim. Although it may not seem aesthetically pleasing to touch live creatures or dead insects, rodents and other small animals, you do not become tamei from touching them. I recommend washing your hands

for hygienic reasons, but maintaining hygiene and becoming tamei are unrelated concepts.

By the way, the word tzav, used in Modern Hebrew for turtle, is one of the sheratzim, but means toad, according to Rashi. I have no idea who decided to use this word for turtle, but it is not consistent with halachic authorities. There is no reason to assume that a dead turtle makes one tamei.

Amorphous amphibians

At this point, let us refer back to one of our opening questions: “What is the difference between a toad and a frog?”

A zoologist will note several differences, but this is a halachic article. According to Rashi, a toad is one of the eight sheratzim that are tamei, and a frog is not (Taharos 5:1, 4).

Laws of sheratzim

Regarding the tumah of sheratzim, the Torah states that one who touches them becomes tamei, but it mentions nothing about the person's clothing requiring immersion, nor does it state that someone becomes tamei when he carries them. This is because a sheretz makes someone tamei only if he touches it, and not if he moves it without touching. Furthermore, his clothing and anything else he touches while touching the sheretz, don't become tamei, unless they are in direct physical contact with the sheretz.

Toad vs. frog

Why did the Torah declare only these eight creatures to be tamei, but no others?

This is a question that we can ask, but probably not answer, other than to accept the gezeiras hakasuv, the declaration of the Torah, and observe it as Hashem's will. Although we endeavor to explain the reasons for our commandments, we realize that we can never assume that we understand the reason for a mitzvah. We explore possible reasons for a mitzvah in order to enhance our experience when we observe it. We do this when we can. However, I have not found any commentary that endeavors to explain what it is about these eight specific creeping creatures, but no others, that generates tumah.

I will be continuing this topic in my next article.

Conclusion

This article has served as an introduction to some of the basic rules of tumah and taharah relating to neveilah and sheratzim. We hope and pray to be able to observe all of these laws soon.

* This translation follows Malbim.

** With the exception of the ko'ach, our translation follows Rashi's commentary.

*** Most commentators identify this either with the chameleon or with the monitor, both of which are varieties of lizard.

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה