

# The Narrow Bridge

## גשר צר מאוד

### PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

#### Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Shemini

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רפואה שלמה פעסל בת גאלדא / לזכות חילינו

#### RECEIVING DIVINITY

##### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"And it was on the eighth day that Moshe summoned Aharon and his sons, and the Elders of Israel." (9:1)*

Due to the limitations of our finite human minds, we cannot attain ultimate Divine consciousness on our own. G-d therefore revealed Divinity in such a way that we can grasp it, by giving us the Torah. Once this had been accomplished, the next step was to prepare the world to absorb the G-dliness that is inherent in the Torah, for without preparation on our part, Divine revelation cannot be absorbed into our being, and therefore cannot elevate us in any meaningful or lasting way.

G-d gave us the Torah through Moshe, but Aharon was the one who made society receptive to G-dliness by inspiring the people to aspire to the spiritual life. It was therefore Aharon who completed the process of Divine revelation begun by Moshe. The rites that Moshe performed in the Tabernacle's installation rites did not reveal G-d's presence; only those that Aharon performed accomplished this.

We all desire to feel G-d's presence in our lives. In order for this to occur, we must imitate Aharon: "love peace and pursue peace; love your fellow creatures and bring them close to the Torah." (Likutei Sichot, vol. 7, pp. 298-299) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

#### UNITED TEAM

##### Rabbi Avi Wiesenfeld

*"And it was on the eighth day that Moshe summoned Aharon and his sons, and the Elders of Israel." (9:1)*

It was 1980 and the coach charged with training the U.S. Olympic hockey team had a daunting task. It was his job to take a group of college students, amateur hockey players, and develop and train them to play against professional, seasoned players from around the world. He began his mission by asking each one of them for his name, where he came from, and for which university team he played.

Each player responded with his name, his city of origin, and the name of his university team. Five months before the 1980 Winter Olympics, they played a game against Norway. The score was 3:3, which most considered to be an incredible achievement for the nascent team, but the coach was very disappointed and felt they could have done better.

The coach decided to add more intensive training to their regimen, and he put them through rigorous exercises on the ice for extended periods of time. Eventually, the team manager told the coach to ease up on them, explaining that these kids cannot take any more practice. The coach was disinterested in the manager's concerns, and he kept pushing the players to keep practicing. This continued until the players literally began to collapse from exhaustion.

Finally, the coach assembled all of the players and called out to them: "Who are you playing for?" When they responded, "We are playing for the United States of America!" the coach smiled with satisfaction and sent them off to the locker room. The coach knew that he had succeeded in uniting a group of students with a profound sense of a common goal.

They went on to play against the legendary, unbeatable Soviet team, and in what became one of the most famous games of hockey history, they defeated the Soviets and took home the Olympic gold medal.

The Parshah begins with a description of the eighth day of the inauguration of the *Mishkan* and the *Korbanos* that Aharon and his sons offered. The Ramban (Vayikra 9:3) quotes the Midrash that asks why the Jewish people brought more *Korbanos* than Aharon haKohen. The Midrash answers that the Jewish people needed to atone for two sins, "the sin at the beginning and the sin at the end" - referring, respectively, to the sin of the sale of Yosef and the sin of the Golden Calf.

The Shem mi'Shmuel asks, why did the Jewish people need to attain atonement for the sale of Yosef, which happened hundreds of years earlier, particularly at a time of such tremendous *simcha* - the inauguration of the *Mishkan*?

He answers that now that the *Mishkan* was being erected, *Klal Yisrael* were no longer permitted to offer sacrifices on privately-built altars. The *Mishkan* brought *Klal Yisrael* together, focusing the entire nation on the single objective of serving Hashem as one nation, in one place. Therefore, all *Korbanos* had to be brought there and could no longer be offered on a private *bamah*. The brothers' act of selling Yosef into slavery was an act of divisiveness that tore apart the family of Yaakov. Therefore, the inauguration of the *Mishkan*, a time of great *achdus*, was a particularly appropriate time for *Klal Yisrael* to seek atonement for the sale of Yosef

When there is *achdus* among us, the *Shechinah* can rest upon us. We, as well as the *Shechinah*, have been enduring the suffering of *galus* for so long. What will help us bring the *Shechinah* back home? The Shem mi'Shmuel explains that when we finally realize that we are not unconnected individuals, but rather we are all inseparable parts of one *Klal Yisrael*, then we will be *zocheh* to see the end of the *galus* and the return of the *Shechinah* to the Jewish people.

## IT'S ALL FROM ABOVE

### Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

*"And it was on the eighth day that Moshe summoned Aharon and his sons, and the Elders of Israel." (9:1)*

After serving as the *Kohen Gadol* for seven days, Hashem informed Moshe that he had to relinquish the role to Aharon. The Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 11:6 with Shemos 4:13) notes that Moshe did not initially know that he would not be the *Kohen Gadol* until after seven days when he was replaced, corresponding to the seventh day of his argument with Hashem as to who would redeem the Jewish People from Egypt.

The Ohr HaChaim notes that a natural response for having to give up such a prestigious position would have been to transfer power reluctantly and quietly, yet Moshe acted with great alacrity, joy, and fanfare despite knowing that he would be forfeiting this holy duty to Aharon and his descendants until the end of time.

Moshe's enthusiasm is all the more impressive considering that the role of *Kohen Gadol* was originally intended for him and his children, yet, after insisting that Aharon be chosen to lead the Jewish People out from Egypt in his stead, Hashem became angry and removed the priesthood from Moshe in favor of Aharon (Zevachim 102a). Nevertheless, Moshe's joy at Aharon's appointment was so immense that the Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 3:6) writes, he would not have been any happier if he himself would have been appointed as the permanent *Kohen Gadol*.

Although Moshe's sincere and perfect acceptance of Hashem's "punishment" was truly remarkable, by acknowledging that everything that Hashem does is for our greatest benefit, we too can come to fully accept the difficulties and challenges that we face in life.

## CELEBRATING FOR OTHERS

### Rabbi Jeremy Finn

*"And it was on the eighth day that Moshe summoned Aharon and his sons, and the Elders of Israel." (9:1)*

Rabbeinu Bachya cites a Midrash that connects *וייה ביום השמיני* and the burning bush. The reason why Aharon was appointed to be the *Kohen Gadol* was due to his happiness when he heard that Moshe had been chosen as leader, as it says, *אמר רבי שמעון בן יוחאי הלב ששמח בגדולת, "Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai says that the heart that rejoiced when his brother was elevated to greatness shall wear the Urim V'Tumim."* Now was that moment when Aharon was to take over.

The Midrash Tanchuma (Shemini 3) states that at the time when Aharon was appointed as the *Kohen Gadol* and his children as *Kohanim*, Moshe Rabbeinu said to him, *שכשם ששמח בגדולתי כך אני שמח בגדולתך* - "the same way that you were happy for me when I was appointed leader, so too I am glad for you now that you have been appointed *Kohen Gadol*."

The Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh proves this point from the way that Moshe Rabbeinu behaved when appointing Aharon.

Suppose you are jealous or do not wish a certain person to be appointed to a high office, and yet you are the one that has to appoint him. In that case, you are in all likelihood going to make sure that the appointment process is long and stretched out in order to delay the inevitable.

Second, when the actual time comes for the inauguration, you will perform it in stages, again to delay the inevitable and to save you the pain of seeing him appointed.

Finally, you will try to attract as little attention as possible to the inauguration.

Moshe Rabbeinu, however, acted in the completely opposite way when it came to appointing Aharon and his sons. First, he appointed them immediately when the time came for doing so. *וייה ביום השמיני* - as soon as it was day on the eighth day, Moshe Rabbeinu called for Aharon and his sons, without delay.

Second, he did not appoint them in stages but *קרא לאהרן וכלבניו*, even though seeing them all together only reinforced the message that not only was Moshe not going to be the *Kohen Gadol*, but also that his children would not be *Kohanim*. Nonetheless, the appointment was made in one go.

Finally, the appointment was made in front of the Elders in order that they would act as witnesses that the appointment had been sanctioned by Hashem.

From his behavior, we can see clearly that Moshe Rabbeinu was happy for Aharon and his sons.

Likewise, it befits us to be happy for other people's success - to celebrate with them at their *simchas*, and to rejoice with them for their good fortune.

## JUST GETTING STARTED

### Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

*"And it was on the eighth day that Moshe summoned Aharon and his sons, and the Elders of Israel." (9:1)*

The word קרא, summoned, appears inappropriate. After all, Aharon and his sons were working with Moshe for the past seven days. For what reason did Moshe feel it necessary to summon them? He should have merely ordered them to bring the mandated sacrifices.

This teaches us that although Aharon and his sons had just finished performing the *mitzvos* of the *milluim* and that of sitting in the Courtyard, they still required preparation and intent for a new *mitzvah*, just as if they were entering anew. The reason for this was so that they should rejoice with this *mitzvah* just as with the acceptance of the previous one, similar to the joy at the giving of the Torah. One must perform each *mitzvah* as though this was the only *mitzvah* given to him at the time. So should it be with Torah study as well, for this will afford one joy and pleasure from the *mitzvah*. If approached in this fashion, one will remember his learning very well, as well as if he had learned it in his youth, when he had only that to remember. In one's adulthood, one must do the same. When one comes home from work, he should make an effort to take his mind off all mundane affairs and concentrate completely on learning.

Alternatively, we learn from here that in spite of any preparations one may have made to become holy, he must still feel as if he is just starting out. One must realize that to serve in sanctity he must sense that he is not prepared at all.

## ON TO THE NEXT

### Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

*"And it was on the eighth day that Moshe summoned Aharon and his sons, and the Elders of Israel. He said to Aharon, 'Take a calf for yourself...'" (9:1-2)*

Why did Hashem command Moshe to take these animals for sacrifice without any preparation? Would it not have been more proper to prepare the sacrifices first, as by the daily sacrifice and the Passover sacrifice, which require examination four days prior to their being offered?

Perhaps it is to demonstrate that as soon as we complete one *mitzvah* we must eagerly go on to the next. On the eighth day the *Kohanim* completed the week-long *mitzvah* of the *milluim*, the investitures, when they did all that Moshe commanded, and immediately afterwards they were given another one. In order not to interrupt the sequence, Hashem did not command them to first take the animals and to examine them for four days, but rather to sacrifice them immediately after the completion of the seven days. From here we can learn that when one completes a *mitzvah*, he should not be content that he is now finished with that *mitzvah*, but should immediately seek another *mitzvah* to perform.

For this reason, when we complete the reading of the Torah on Simchas Torah, we immediately commence the reading of the Torah anew. This should be one's attitude to all *mitzvos*.

## REPAIRING THE DAMAGE

### Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

*"He said to Aharon, 'Take a calf for yourself for a sin-offering and a ram for a burnt-offering - both unblemished - and offer them before G-d.'" (9:2)*

Aharon is instructed by Moshe to bring an offering to atone for his role in the sin of the Golden Calf (9:2). The Jewish people were also commanded to bring an offering to atone for their part in the Golden Calf. Why is Aharon instructed to bring a *Chatas* or "sin offering," while the rest of the people were to bring an *Olah*, or "elevation offering"?

Rav Yisrael Belsky explains that the *Olah* offering is brought for improper intentions and thoughts, which, in this case, was the people's skepticism of Moshe; the offering is entirely consumed by fire with no substantial remains. The *Chatas*, on the other hand, is brought for the actions perpetrated, so its remains, like the consequences of our actions, need to be handled properly.

This direct correlation between transgressions and their respective offerings highlights the implications of our thoughts and actions. We are blessed to have a complex system that addresses both our thoughts and our actions, enabling us to have a mindful approach to our pursuit of self-improvement.

## HOLY TRANSFORMATION

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*"He said to Aharon, 'Take a calf for yourself for a sin-offering and a ram for a burnt-offering - both unblemished - and offer them before G-d.'" (9:2)*

Specifically a calf, recalling the sin of the golden calf. By sacrificing this calf for G-d rather than for idolatry, the root of evil could be turned into a vehicle for holiness. (Likutey Halakhos III, p. 354)

## GIFTED REVELATIONS

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"An ox and a ram as peace-offerings, to slaughter before G-d, and a grain-offering kneaded with oil, for today G-d is appearing to you." (9:4)*

There are natural levels of Divine revelation - whether Divine beneficence or Divine consciousness - that we can elicit. The Torah is the "instruction manual" that G-d gave us in order to show us how to live life in the way that elicits His beneficence and enables us to sense His presence in our lives.



However, there are also supranatural levels of Divine revelation, which are beyond our ability to elicit. The prime example of this type of revelation was that which occurred on the final, eighth day of the installation rites for the Tabernacle, when G-d completed the inauguration of the Tabernacle by revealing His presence within it. This revelation of Divinity was far too intense to be elicited by anything any human being could possibly do. Nonetheless, since G-d did not want us to feel unworthy of this revelation, He prescribed certain rites for this day, more as a “gift” for us to give Him than an obligation to fulfill.

In this way, G-d taught us that when we observe His commandments in fulfillment of our obligations toward Him, we elicit natural levels of Divine revelation, but when we give Him the “gift” of going beyond what He requires of us, we elicit supranatural levels of Divine revelation. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 22, pp. 19-20) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **STANDING UNITED**

### **Rabbi Moshe Schochet**

*“And the entire congregation approached, and they stood before Hashem [in order to hear Moshe’s instructions to the Kohanim].” (9:5)*

Rav Yisrael Yosef Bronstein (Ah Chassidishe Vort) understands these words very differently. He explains that the Torah is teaching us that only when *Klal Yisrael* gathers together as one and becomes close - *Va’yikrivu es kol ha’eidah*, can they stand appropriately before Hashem - *va’yaamdu lifnei Hashem*. Our ability to serve Hashem the right way is solely dependent on the unity that exists within the Jewish people. This perhaps is the source for the Arizal’s daily custom of accepting upon himself the *mitzvah* of *v’ahavta l’reyacha kamocha* (loving your neighbor as yourself) before accepting the yoke of Hashem. One can’t be a servant of Hashem before first expressing one’s love for His children.

As we continue to find ourselves in the midst of the long exile that was caused by baseless hatred, let us accentuate that which unites us and ignore that which divides us. By working hard to get closer to each other, we, like *Bnei Yisrael*, can stand before and serve Hashem in the right way.

## **WORTH CONTEMPLATING**

### **Reb Zusia of Anipoli**

*“And Moshe said, ‘This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do; then the glory of Hashem may appear to you.’” (9:6)*

If a person wishes to know if his action is a *mitzvah*, “the thing that Hashem has commanded you,” first he must examine his actions to see “if the Glory of Hashem will appear to you.”

## **REMOVING DISUNITY**

### **Chiddushei HaRim**

*“This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do; then the glory of Hashem may appear to you.” (9:6)*

The words “This is the thing” are specific; that is why they are preceded with the “definite *hey*” - “the thing.” This teaches us which of the evil inclinations should be removed. We are requested to remove hatred, dissension, and communal conflict from our hearts. “This is the thing Hashem commanded us to do.”

## **BECAUSE HE SAID SO**

### **Tiferes Shmuel**

*“This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do; then the glory of Hashem may appear to you.” (9:6)*

Every commandment has countless deeper implications and meanings, and even people capable of discerning some of them must realize that whatever they know is still only a drop in the bucket compared to the wealth of meaning inherent in any one of G-d’s commands. It is therefore best to perform the commandment for no other reason but that G-d bade us do it.

This, too, is Moshe’s message to the Jews: “This is the thing that Hashem commanded” - Do it because it is what G-d commanded you. Don’t try to find other reasons, for you’ll never understand all its deeper implications. But if you’ll do it simply because it is G-d’s will, “the glory of Hashem may appear to you.”

## **NEED FOR CONFIDENCE**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“Moshe said to Aharon, ‘Come near to the Altar and perform the service of your sin-offering and your olah-offering and provide atonement for yourself and for the people; then perform the service of the people’s offering and provide atonement for them, as Hashem has commanded.’” (9:7)*

We are taught that there are three inherent traits of the Jewish people: bashfulness, mercifulness, and kindness (Yevamos 79a). Therefore, although Aharon knew that G-d chose him for his role as high priest - and indeed, had been preparing for it for a full week before this - he was naturally reluctant to assume a position of greatness.

Moshe therefore reminded Aharon that as praiseworthy as bashfulness is, we must overcome it when it is at odds with performing our Divine mission.

We, too, while cherishing our innate shyness, must not let it interfere with fulfilling our Divine mission. Our innate mercifulness and kindness toward those that need us to help them should in such cases override our innate bashfulness. (Hitva’aduyot 5747, vol. 3, pp. 62-64) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## SHOW OF REMORSE

### Divrei Sha'arei Chaim

*"Moshe said to Aharon, 'Come near to the Altar and perform the service of your sin-offering and your olah-offering and provide atonement for yourself and for the people; then perform the service of the people's offering and provide atonement for them, as Hashem has commanded.'" (9:7)*

Aharon was shy and afraid to go up there. That is why Moshe said to him: "Why are you diffident? It is for this purpose that you were chosen." (Rashi)

Moshe explained to Aharon that he had been chosen because he was still ashamed of his participation in the making of the Golden Calf and still atoning for it. The Sages relate that following the incident, Aharon had put iron shackles around his loins and traveled from dwelling to dwelling to teach the Jews to accept the sovereignty of the kingdom of Heaven. For this reason, Moshe felt that Aharon was the one best qualified to atone for the misdeeds of all the repentant sinners among the people of Israel.

## WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

### Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

*"Moshe said to Aharon, 'Come near to the Altar and perform the service of your sin-offering and your olah-offering and provide atonement for yourself and for the people; then perform the service of the people's offering and provide atonement for them, as Hashem has commanded.'" (9:7)*

When the time came for Aharon to begin serving as *kohen gadol* in the *Mishkan*, Moshe instructed him to proceed to the *Mizbe'ach* and offer his sacrifices (9:7). Rashi writes: שהיה אהרן בוש וירא לגשת... אמר לו משה, למה אתה בוכה? – "Since Aharon was ashamed and afraid of approaching, Moshe said to him: Why are you ashamed? For this you were chosen!"

The simple understanding of Rashi's comment is that Aharon felt unworthy of the lofty position of *kohen gadol*, of performing the *avodah* (service) in the *Mishkan*, and so Moshe assured him that Hashem chose him for this role, such that he had no reason to fear or to hesitate.

In the past, we shared a different understanding, offered by the Arizal. He explained the words לכך נבחרת to mean that Aharon was chosen for the role of *kohen gadol* precisely because of his humility, because he felt reluctant to assume this distinguished position. The most qualified leaders are the ones who are keenly aware of their frailties, of their limitations, of their deficiencies, and are willing to acknowledge their mistakes and learn from them. Moshe was thus telling Aharon that לכך נבחרת - it is specifically because he felt uneasy about serving in the *Mishkan* that he was deemed the worthiest candidate for this important role.

A different explanation of Rashi's comment was presented by the Imrei Emes, the third Rebbe of Ger. He cites the teaching of Rav Chaim Vital that each person has a נקודה מיוחדת, a specific goal to accomplish, a particular spiritual mission that he must fulfill. The *yetzer hara* is aware of each person's unique mission, and so it focuses its efforts on distracting and obstructing the person in that specific area. Whenever a person finds himself facing an especially difficult challenge, particular hardship and struggle - this is the area in which he is expected to make his breakthrough, to achieve, to excel, to fulfill his unique mission. This means that when we feel resistance as we try to do the right thing, we must realize that we're on the right track, we are doing exactly what we're supposed to be doing to actualize our potential and fulfill our unique purpose in this world.

The Imrei Emes explains that this was Moshe's message to Aharon: לכן נבחרת. The fact that he felt resistance, that this was difficult for him, that he struggled, that he felt uneasy about proceeding, showed that this was his role, that this was his unique mission.

The Imrei Emes here is teaching us that struggle and resistance should motivate us, not discourage us. If whatever it is we're working on does not go smoothly, if we find the process difficult and challenging, when success does not come easily - this is because we are pursuing our unique goal and mission, a pursuit which, by definition, is fraught with struggle. Instead of backing down and despairing, we should assure ourselves that לכן נבחרת, that we have been chosen to achieve and excel, and the struggles we face are part of this process.

## JOINT RESPONSIBILITY

### Meshech Chochmah

*"Moshe said to Aharon, 'Come near to the Altar and perform the service of your sin-offering and your olah-offering and provide atonement for yourself and for the people; then perform the service of the people's offering and provide atonement for them, as Hashem has commanded.'" (9:7)*

According to the Sages, anyone who causes someone to be punished is regarded as a sinner. The Jews had forced Aharon to make the Golden Calf, and thus caused him to be punished. The Sages also teach that anyone who causes his fellow to be punished is not allowed to enter the vicinity of the Holy One. Therefore, in addition to their own terrible sin, they bore partial guilt for Aharon's sin. Hence, the atonement for Aharon was also atonement for the Jews' sin to the extent that they contributed to Aharon's sin.

Accordingly, Moshe said to Aharon: "Approach the altar and perform your sin-offering and your burnt-offering, atoning for yourself and for the people." Your sacrifices will serve as atonement not only for you, but also for the people that caused you to sin.

## **SUPERIOR SANCTITY**

### **Rabbi Moshe Feinstein**

*“Moshe said to Aharon, ‘Come near to the Altar and perform the service of your sin-offering and your olah-offering and provide atonement for yourself and for the people; then perform the service of the people’s offering and provide atonement for them, as Hashem has commanded.” (9:7)*

Rashi explains that Aharon was embarrassed. Moshe said to him, “Why are you embarrassed? This is what you have been chosen for.”

Ramban, citing Toras Kohanim, relates a parable of a king whose wife was bashful in his presence. Her sister told her to have courage, and she followed her advice. The analogy is puzzling, because even if Aharon was embarrassed, he had no choice but to obey Hashem’s command. What comparison is there to the parable where the king’s wife had a choice?

The answer is that surely Aharon would have performed the service despite his embarrassment, just as he would perform any *mitzvah*. Hashem, however, intended that the service of Aharon and his sons, the *Kohanim*, be unlike any other *mitzvah*. Aharon and his children were to be made aware that the *mitzvos* they were commanded to do in conjunction with the Temple service were given to them because they were invested with a higher degree of sanctity than the rest of the Jewish people.

Indeed, before the *Kohanim* bless the community, they recite the blessing: אשר קדשנו בקדשתו של אהרן, “Who sanctified us with the sanctity of Aharon.” We do not find this formula for any other *berachah* over a *mitzvah*. The firstborn, who performed the sacrificial service prior to the selection of the *Kohanim*, were not invested with a superior sanctity, unlike Aharon who was endowed with the sanctity of the *kehunah*. The blessing for all *mitzvos* is: אשר קדשנו במצותיו, “Who sanctified us with His commandments,” as there is no difference between a *mitzvah* that the entire nation is commanded to keep and a *mitzvah* incumbent on the individual.

That is why Aharon was ashamed to do the service. It involved assuming a superior sanctity, and that was embarrassing to him. Thereupon, Moshe said to Aharon, “You must perform the service with your greater *kedushah*, because you have been chosen by Hashem for that function.”

This, then, is the connection to the parable. The service performed by a wife differs from that of a servant. Whereas the latter is merely work, the former is an act of love and affection.

Because this service was one of love and affection, the king’s wife was bashful that she was more exalted than others. Her sister explained to her, “You have been chosen for this.”

Perhaps this is the meaning of the Midrash that Rashi cites on verse 23 which says that the community thought that as a result of Moshe’s service during the seven days of the *milluim*, the *Shechinah* would surely rest upon the *Mishkan*. Who could be greater than Moshe? When the *Shechinah* failed to rest upon the *Mishkan*, they were ashamed. Moshe said to them, “In this matter, my brother Aharon is my superior, for with his sacrifices, the *Shechinah* will rest upon you,” because his service was a function of his superior *kedushah*.

Similarly, *talmidei chachamim*, who are termed *Kohanim* in Tanach, also possess a greater *kedushah*. Thus, Shmuel II 8:18: “and the sons of Dovid were *Kohanim*,” is explained by Rambam in Hilchos Shemittah (13:13) as meaning that they were Torah scholars. *Talmidei chachamim* who possess this superior sanctity are obligated to act in an exemplary fashion and observe the Torah beyond the letter of the law, with a stringency which reflects their superior *kedushah*.

## **HUMBLE GREATNESS**

### **Rabbi Aryeh Dachs**

*“Moshe said to Aharon, ‘Come near to the Altar...” (9:7)*

The story goes that Rav Yitzchak Blazer, also known as Rav Itzele Peterberger, was approached by the community of St. Petersburg (which was then the capital of Russia) to serve as their Rabbi. Rabbi Itzele was a student of *mussar*, a humble man who eschewed honor, and was therefore naturally hesitant to accept the offer. As an aside, he did end up serving as the Chief Rabbi of St. Petersburg for close to twenty years, earning the moniker Peterberger, yet he was always uncomfortable relying on communal funds. Eventually he resigned and emigrated to Israel, then called Palestine, for the remainder of his life. At the time of the offer, his rebbi, Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, urged him to take the position. Rav Itzele explained to Rav Yisrael that he simply could not take the job, telling him, “I am not ready.” Rav Yisrael responded, “Should I recommend someone who thinks that he is ready for the position?”

Aharon Hakohen was reluctant to take part in the inauguration of the *Mishkan*. The verse states that Moshe told Aharon, “*Kerav* - Come near,” which implies that Moshe needed to encourage Aharon to approach. Aharon knew his shortcomings; he had played a part in the calamitous sin of the Golden Calf, the *eigel*, and was therefore ashamed to come forth to fulfill his duty and consecrate the *Mishkan*. The Midrash expounds further that Moshe said to Aharon, “Why are you ashamed? ‘*L’kach nivcharta!*’ You were chosen for this!”

Simply understood, Moshe was telling Aharon that he cannot abstain from his duty because Hashem chose him to serve as the High Priest. He was chosen despite his flaws.

This is a resounding lesson for us; our flaws and past misdeeds can haunt us, but “the show must go on.” We mustn’t allow our flaws to deter our spiritual mission. Like Aharon, we were all chosen to fulfill our unique spiritual mission. We all have a job to do; we cannot allow our shortcomings to interfere.

The Arizal and later the Baal Shem Tov explain the Midrash a little differently. When Moshe told Aharon, *“l’kach nivcharta,”* he was telling Aharon that it was not despite his shame that he was chosen, but rather due to his shame. He was telling Aharon, “You were specifically chosen because you have humility. You are humbled by your misdeeds and feel ashamed. Therefore, you are the right pick for the job of *Kohen Gadol*.”

Shame is typically viewed as a negative emotion. Feeling bad and unworthy is not only inaccurate, it can be psychologically impairing. However, there are feelings of shame that are valuable. When we err, we are awakened to our own frailty. Perhaps we are not as spiritually great as we thought we were. The humility that comes from this honest perspective is precious. Aharon was keenly aware of his own limitations and therefore felt out of place in his role as High Priest. This was the “shame” Aharon felt. The feeling led to an admirable sort of humility, which ultimately earned him the job he was certain he was unfit for.

We can be very hard on ourselves when we lapse in our religious commitments. It is important to understand the first lesson that is brought to light by the simple reading of the Midrash: We should not allow ourselves to be dragged down because of our misdeeds. We have a mission, which was designed for us despite any flaws we have. We can also comfort ourselves with the mystical lesson of the Midrash. Our misdeeds can give us a spiritual reality check. We can gain insight into where we are religiously. That understanding is humbling, and that understanding will undoubtedly serve as a great merit for us!

## NEVER TOO LATE

### Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

*“Aharon approached the altar and slaughtered the calf that was his sin-offering.” (9:8)*

The Rishonim explain that when Aharon approached the altar to bring his sacrifice to Hashem, the Satan came and appeared to Aharon from within the fire on the altar, in the form of the golden calf. This was an attempt to discourage him from serving Hashem and bringing his sacrifice by reminding him of his role with the golden calf. In response to this, Moshe Rabbeinu said to Aharon “Approach the altar” (9:7). Don’t let the Satan’s discouraging ideas stop you! With this, Aharon approached the altar and slaughtered the calf; meaning, by overcoming the discouraging thoughts and feelings of inadequacy, he slaughtered his *yetzer hara* that appeared in the form of a calf.

## LEADING WITH HUMILITY

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*“Aharon lifted his hands towards the people and blessed them. Then he went down from having performed the sin-offering, the burnt-offering, and the peace-offering.” (9:22)*

Although Aharon was aware that it was his performance of this special day’s rituals that would bring G-d’s presence into the Tabernacle, and he did everything exactly as Moshe instructed, he still felt unworthy of his role. The memory of his participation in the incident of the Golden Calf still weighed heavily on him.

Aharon expressed these sentiments when he blessed the people, applying the text of the priestly blessing to the day’s unique circumstances:

He said, “We know that G-d’s presence can only dwell in this Tabernacle if He has forgiven us for the incident of the Golden Calf. Since I played a central role in this incident, His forgiveness for all of us depends upon His forgiving me. Therefore, until we know that G-d has forgiven me, I cannot bless your efforts by myself. Therefore, I must appeal to G-d Himself to bless you and watch over you. May G-d shine His face to you and grace you with His presence, as a result of His being partial toward you, forgiving you the sin of the Golden Calf, and thereby granting you peace.”

Like all great Jewish leaders, it was Aharon’s feelings of inadequacy that truly made him fit for his role. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 22, pp. 39-44) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## PROTECTING OUR BLESSINGS

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*“Aharon lifted his hands towards the people and blessed them. Then he went down from having performed the sin-offering, the burnt-offering, and the peace-offering.” (9:22)*

The first stanza of the priestly blessing is, “May G-d bless you and watch over you,” which, as Rashi tells us, means, “May G-d bless you with abundance and watch over you so that no one steals your wealth.”

Spiritually, the abundance referred to here is our success in our efforts to refine ourselves and serve G-d wholeheartedly. This blessing needs to be guarded from being “stolen,” since the forces of negativity within us often try to sabotage the spiritual excitement that we generate in prayer, transforming it afterwards into righteous indignation or an awakening of physical desire.

We therefore ask G-d to not only bless us with success in spiritual refinement and the experience of spiritual ecstasy, but also with the ability to properly focus it and channel it in pure and wholesome directions. (Sefer HaMa’amarim 5705, p. 204) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky



## JUST A QUESTION OF HOW

### Imrei Emes

*"Aharon lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them..." (9:22)*

At the time when Aharon became eligible for the priestly gifts, he also became eligible to bestow the blessing - he and his descendants until the time of the Resurrection of the Dead. (Midrash)

Concerning the Priestly Blessing, the Torah (Bamidbar 7:28) says: "In this way shall you bless the Children of Israel." But there is no explicit commandment in the Torah specifying that it is the duty of the *kohanim* to bless the people at all. Why was this commandment not explicitly set down?

Because the *kohanim* were endowed with loving-kindness, which made them eager to bless the Jews on their own. This is why the Torah did not find it necessary to command them to do it, and confined itself to giving directions as to how the *kohanim* were to give the blessing.

## HANDFUL OF BLESSINGS

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*"Aharon lifted his hands towards the people and blessed them..." (9:22)*

The main blessing comes through the hands (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 358). The greater the purity of one's hands - the cleaner they are from usury and other monetary transgressions - the greater one's capacity to receive and channel blessing.

## FOCUS ON THE PRESENT

### Radomsker Rebbe

*"Aharon lifted his hands towards the people and blessed them. Then he went down from having performed the sin-offering, the burnt-offering and the peace-offering." (9:22)*

The Talmud states: "One does not bypass a *mitzvah*" (Pesachim 64b).

It is the way of the evil inclination to hold back an individual as he approaches to serve Hashem, especially as he begins to pray. The inclination asks how a person can approach holiness when he is full of transgression.

But that is really not the case. Hashem listens to all and has mercy on all.

While performing *mitzvos*, one does not think of his transgressions. When one is doing good, the evil that lurks in the heart is removed and he does not think of anything else. That is the meaning of "He descended from having performed the sin-offering, the *olah*-offering, and the peace-offering." While Aharon was blessing the Jewish people, he did not remember any of their transgressions.

## EVEN IN THE DARK

### Imrei Shefer

*"Moshe and Aharon went into the Tent of Meeting, and they went out and they blessed the people..." (9:23)*

Why did Moshe enter together with Aharon? To instruct him concerning the incense. (Rashi)

Why didn't Moshe teach Aharon about the incense ceremony before, when he had gone over the other sacrificial procedures?

Actually, Moshe didn't go with Aharon to instruct him in the incense procedure, but to prepare him for a tragic occurrence in which incense was to be involved, namely, the death of Aharon's sons Nadav and Avihu who were devoured by fire when they brought their incense with "foreign fire before G-d" (10:2).

The Torah relates that when this tragedy struck, Aharon took it with exceptional self-control for - like all exceedingly righteous people - he accepted sorrow with serenity and gratitude.

It was this ability to praise G-d even for tragedy and accept suffering with serenity that Moshe went to teach Aharon in the Tent of Meeting.

The solemn moment when Moshe and Aharon entered the *Mishkan* for the first time was the most fitting occasion for Moshe to teach Aharon "concerning the incense," i.e., to be calm, and to praise G-d even for the crushing sorrow that was to befall him because of an offering of incense; namely, his two sons' death. As the Sages say, "One must bless [G-d] for bad tidings just as one blesses Him for good tidings."

## LOVING OUR FELLOW

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"When they came out, they blessed the people; and the Glory of Hashem appeared to all the people." (9:23)*

It was only as a result of the combined efforts of Moshe and Aharon that the Divine presence descended upon the Tabernacle - and thereby upon the Jewish people in general. Aharon performed all the sacrificial rites, but Moshe instructed Aharon how to perform them.

Aharon embodied the trait of brotherly love. As the Talmudic sage Hillel instructs us, "Be of the disciples of Aharon, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving your fellow creatures and drawing them close to the Torah" (Avos 1:12).

Moshe's role was to convey G-d's teachings to the people, which included teaching Aharon how to love others.

From this we learn that the key to constructing our own Tabernacle - i.e., to making our own lives into a home for G-d, wherein G-d's presence can be revealed - is loving our fellow Jews as G-d instructs us in His Torah. (Hitva'aduyot 5742, vol. 3, pp. 1125-1126) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky



## MUTUAL LOVE

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*"A fire went out from before G-d and consumed the burnt-offering and the fats upon the Altar. When all the people saw this, they sang praises and fell upon their faces." (9:24)*

Though a fire from Heaven descends upon the Altar, it is a *mitzvah* to bring an earthly fire as well. (Yoma 21b)

The fire from Heaven sent to burn the sacrifices (i.e., to receive them) represents a burning love of G-d towards us. When we present our love for G-d as an offering upon the Altar - even though that love may be blemished - the Heavenly fire consumes our passions and purifies them. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 38a)

## CAUTION: VERY HOT

### Rebbe Nachman

*"Aharon's sons Nadav and Avihu each took a fire pan and placed fire and incense upon it. They brought before G-d a foreign fire which He had not commanded them." (10:1)*

A person who burns with desire for G-d creates a "fire," an "appeasing fragrance" that brings Him satisfaction, for His will has been done. However, one must be wary of the fire of the evil inclination burning within him. This was the "foreign fire" that Nadav and Avihu brought before G-d. (See Likutey Moharan I, 41)

## ALL IN GOOD TIME

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*"Aharon's sons Nadav and Avihu each took a fire pan and placed fire and incense upon it. They brought before G-d a foreign fire which He had not commanded them." (10:1)*

The dedication of the Tabernacle was such a holy act that an incredible revelation of G-dliness was manifest at that time. Seeing this, Nadav and Avihu thought that the time had come to bring a complete rectification for the sin of the golden calf, which had been caused by the mixed multitude. Now that G-dliness was drawn back into the world, Nadav and Avihu thought they could ignite a "fire" - a total eradication of the forces of evil from the world. But the time was not yet ripe for this rectification, and their fire was considered a "foreign" fire that consumed them instead.

When a person desires to draw others close to G-d, he must exercise infinite patience and not act hastily. Therefore, the Torah (Vayikra 16:1-2) relates: "G-d spoke to Moshe after the death of the two sons of Aharon... Speak to your brother Aharon. He must not enter at all times the Holy [i.e., he should enter only on Yom Kippur in this fashion]." G-d's commandment is juxtaposed with the reminder of the death of Nadav and Avihu to teach that one must not act hastily, even when entering the realm of sanctity. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 244)

## COMMUNICATION IS KEY

### Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

*"Aharon's sons Nadav and Avihu each took a fire pan and placed fire and incense upon it. They brought before G-d a foreign fire which He had not commanded them." (10:1)*

Parashas Shemini contains the unfortunate death of two of Aharon's sons because they brought an unauthorized offering before G-d. The *pasuk* describes how Nadav and Avihu each brought their own pan before G-d and how the fire consumed them instead of their offerings (10:1-2). Why would the Torah distinctly tell us that they each took their own pan when it could have simply told us that they each took a pan?

Rabbi Henech Leibowitz quotes a Yalkut that helps answer our question and offers great insight into human nature. Asking for advice is not always easy, especially if pride and ego get in the way. In addition to their failure to discuss their plan with Moshe, each brother took his own pan without first consulting with each other. Had the brothers conferred with each other beforehand, they may have talked through the issues enough to realize that what they were about to do was wrong. Judaism is built on community. We are in this together and must remember to stay connected, communicate, learn from each other, and be inspired by those around us.

## FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS

### Rabbi Moshe Schochet

*"They brought before G-d a foreign fire which He had not commanded them." (10:1)*

There are many suggestions quoted in the Midrash as to what wrong Nadav and Avihu did that caused them to be deserving of death. However, the Chiddushei HaRim points out that one does not have to look farther than the simple reading of the *pasuk* to identify their mistake and what we can learn from it. He explains that Nadav and Avihu, who were righteous and great people with pure intentions, were punished simply because they did something that they weren't commanded to do. The Chiddushei HaRim points out further that if Hashem punished Nadav and Avihu so severely for doing something that they were not instructed to do, we could imagine the positive impact we can make when we perform the *mitzvos* that Hashem did instruct us to do.

[The Chiddushei HaRim adds that it is in view of the foregoing that every blessing we recite before performing a Divine commandment includes the phrase "Who have sanctified us by Your commandments and commanded us to..." The Divine commandment is the fundamental force that makes us holy.]

There are times in our lives when we get caught up in trying to find new and creative ways to connect to Hashem. Instead, we need to realize that Hashem has already provided us with the instruction manual for us to follow.

If we perform the *mitzvos* in the manner that we were commanded to by Hashem, then we are guaranteed to have a positive outcome instead of a potentially negative result. This will surely help us continue to grow closer to Hashem.

## MANAGING ECSTASY

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"A fire went forth from before G-d and consumed them, and they died before Hashem." (10:2)*

Nadav and Avihu were swept up in the ecstasy of the moment. In their intense desire to cleave to G-d, which they expressed through their unauthorized incense offering, they rose through spiritual heights even as they felt their souls leaving them. From this perspective, their death was not a punishment but a fulfillment of their wish to dissolve into G-d's essence.

Nevertheless, we are not intended to imitate their example; on the contrary, we are expressly forbidden to pursue such suicidal spiritual rapture. Although it is necessary to seek inspiration and renew it constantly, the purpose of reaching increasingly higher planes of Divine consciousness is to bring the consciousness that we acquire down into the world, thereby making the world increasingly more conscious of G-d, transforming it into His home. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 3, pp. 987-991) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## SPIRITUAL INTOXICATION

### Sefas Emes

*"A fire went forth from before G-d and consumed them, and they died before Hashem." (10:2)*

They died because they entered the Sanctuary intoxicated with wine. (Rashi)

How can one say that men like Nadav and Avihu could have been guilty of profaning their priestly office by allowing themselves to become intoxicated? This statement is not to be taken literally. It simply means that the two men approached their sacred task with perception and rapture not of Divine origin. The allegory of "wine" is used to describe their conduct because wine is the symbol of wisdom, adding, as it does, to wisdom and opening the heart to understanding, as it is written: "Wine causes the close-mouthed to speak" and the Sages say that "wine makes wise."

Nadav and Avihu went to the Sanctuary with thoughts and emotions that originated from within their hearts. Therein lay their error, because *kohanim*, as representatives of the Merciful One, were expected to perform their functions inspired only by the spiritual implications of the mission entrusted to them by G-d, without any thoughts and feelings of their own.

## NOT AT THEIR EXPENSE

### Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

*"A fire went forth from before G-d and consumed them, and they died before Hashem." (10:2)*

This verse describes the death of Nadav and Avihu, which, according to the Gemara served as punishment for their asking of each other when Moshe and Aharon will leave the world so that they can lead the generation in their stead. This account is very perplexing; how could the great sons of Aharon be eager to lead the Nation when it would mean the death of their own father and uncle?

Rav Yosef Salant answers that they of course had no desire for anyone to die, rather, their words simply reflected a passionate eagerness to come close to Hashem in a way that was only possible at this specific juncture in history. For they knew that a leader only merits as much greatness as his generation itself is worthy of, and at that time, the Jewish People were at their spiritual peak, unparalleled in their understanding of Hashem. Therefore, only by leading this group of people would they personally be able to reach the highest possible level of connection to Hashem.

Now that we see their intentions were only positive and geared toward holiness, we can ask, why were they punished?

Rav Yosef Salant answers that on their level of greatness, such words were inappropriate. Perhaps this is because the pursuit of personal greatness - even spiritual greatness - must never come at the expense of anyone else.

## SHOWING RESTRAINT

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*"A fire went forth from before G-d and consumed them, and they died before Hashem." (10:2)*

Nadav and Avihu died because they burned with great zealotry for G-dliness, even beyond their capabilities (Likutei Halakhot II, p. 408). They did not constrain themselves in matters of spirituality. They received too much light and could not contain it. Therefore, they died (ibid., II, p. 146a).

Though they were great *tzaddikim*, Nadav and Avihu did not exercise restraint when approaching the Holy of Holies, which is the highest level of sanctity in this world.

## ACCEPTANCE AND ACTION

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"And Moshe said to Aharon, 'This is what G-d spoke, saying: I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me, and I will be honored before the entire people'; And Aharon was silent." (10:3)*

There are times when tragic things happen for which there is no rational explanation. In the face of such tragedies, we must realize that our limited minds cannot comprehend G-d's infinite intellect. The only way we can process what has happened is the way Aharon did: through silently accepting G-d's will and our friends' and relatives' condolences.

This acceptance of our fundamental uncertainty applies, however, only to the search for explanations. There is no uncertainty regarding the proper response to tragedy. We must take our cue from our ancestors in Egypt: "The more they oppressed them, the more they increased and spread" (Shemos 1:12). Drawing more Divine revelation into the world through increasing our participation in studying the Torah and fulfilling its commandments will hasten the ultimate and final Redemption, when "death will be swallowed up forever, and G-d will wipe the tears off all faces" (Yeshayahu 25:8). (Igrot Kodesh, vol. 13, pp. 239-240) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **NEEDED IN HEAVEN**

### **Rabbi Moshe Feinstein**

*"And Moshe said to Aharon, 'This is what G-d spoke, saying: I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me, and I will be honored before the entire people'; And Aharon was silent." (10:3)*

It appears from the wording 'אשר דבר ה' that the Torah is referring to something Hashem said at some other time. What statement of G-d is this referring to? At the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe said to the sons of Levi (Shemos 32:27), "So said Hashem, 'Each one place his sword on his thigh,'" a reference to the *mitzvah* of יחרים לאלהים, "He who slaughters sacrifices to the gods shall be destroyed" (ibid. 22:19), which is the death penalty for those who worship idols. Moshe, here, interprets Hashem's statement: "I will be sanctified with those who are nearest Me," as meaning Nadav and Avihu, though he did not hear this explicitly from Hashem.

This is difficult to understand, because there is no apparent indication that Nadav and Avihu died because of their closeness to Hashem. There could have been other reasons for their death. Perhaps they died because of the gravity of their sins. We must perforce say, that since it was a day of great joy to Hashem and the Jewish people, a day that assumed ten "crowns" (Shabbos 87b), it is impossible that they should die on that day solely on account of their sins. Similarly in Shmuel I 11:13, Shaul said, "No man shall be put to death on this day, because today Hashem wrought a salvation." Dovid said the same when he did not permit Shimi ben Gera to be put to death although he was liable to the death penalty.

It must be that the death of Nadav and Avihu was a part of the joy of the dedication of the *Mishkan*. The Gemara in Moed Katan 25b states: "He who rides in the Heavens jubilates and rejoices when the soul of one pure and righteous ascends to Him." Sometimes, that righteous soul is needed in Heaven, as the Rabbis tell us in Kesubos

104a regarding the passing of Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi: "The heavenly beings are seeking Rabbi, and the earthlings are seeking him. The angels and the righteous men, the mighty of the earth, grasped the holy ark." This statement by Chazal is not merely poetic imagery.

This consideration alone would not have sufficed to cause the death of *tzaddikim*, and Hashem would have allowed them to live, if only for the benefit of the living. Solely as a result of the sins of the community did Hashem take these *tzaddikim* to him. At times, however, even if the living are deserving of the presence of the *tzaddik*, as on the day of the erection of the *Mishkan*, Hashem will take him anyway. This is surely because Hashem rejoices with the soul of the *tzaddik*. This, then, was the deciding factor, the great joy that Hashem experiences when he gathers a *tzaddik* to Him. Consequently, when Nadav and Avihu, two of the greatest of that distinguished generation, died on that day, Moshe declared that this was undoubtedly what Hashem meant when He said, "I will be sanctified with those who are nearest Me."

The Torah states further that Aharon subordinated his will to the will of Hashem and accepted everything joyfully. For his silence, he merited a great reward. Now, if his silence was only an indication that he had accepted consolation, it would not have been so unusual. It was, rather, an indication that he participated, as it were, in Hashem's joy, and for that reason he merited a great reward.

## **TIME TO DRINK**

### **Reb Naftali of Ropshitz**

*"Hashem spoke to Aharon, saying, 'Do not drink intoxicating wine, you and your sons with you, when you come to the Tent of Meeting, that you not die. This is an eternal decree for your generations - to distinguish between the sacred and profane, and between the impure and the pure, and to teach the Children of Yisrael.'" (10:8)*

This instructs us to when we can drink: "You and your sons with you" refers to a wedding; "When you come to the Tent of Meeting" refers to at the dedication of a new structure; "That you not die" refers to when a person is cured from a sickness; "This is an eternal decree" refers to a circumcision celebration; "To distinguish between the sacred and the profane" refers to when making Kiddush and Havdalah; "Between pure and impure" refers to Purim (pure - Mordechai, and impure - Haman); "To teach the Children of Israel" refers to a celebration at the end of Torah learning.

## **OUR GUIDING LIGHT**

### **Reb Noson of Breslov**

*"And to teach the Children of Israel all the decrees that G-d has spoken through Moshe." (10:11)*

To teach (*Le'horot*) has the same root as *Torah*. The Torah is a pathfinder that directs a person to the true path of life. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 430)



## NEED FOR HUMILITY

### Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

*“Moshe spoke to Aharon and his remaining sons, Elazar and Itamar, ‘Take the meal-offering that is left over from the fire-offerings of Hashem, and eat it unleavened near the Altar, for they are of superior holiness.’” (10:12)*

After two of Aharon’s sons die offering their own unsanctioned sacrifice, Moshe instructs Aharon and his “remaining” sons to take the remaining offering and eat it with matzah beside the Altar...” (10:12). The word used for “remaining” sons (נוותרים) shares the same root as the word for the remaining sacrifice, although the proper word should have been נותר. What is the purpose of using this particular word, and what is the connection to the subsequent sacrifice mentioned?

Rav Hirsch proposes that the word in connotes the fact that the remaining two sons were tempted to act similarly to their brothers, but were salvaged from acting. What saved the remaining brothers from suffering their brothers’ fate? Perhaps it’s the fact that they exhibited humility in consulting others. This could also explain why the consumption of matzah is mentioned, signifying the symbolic humility of unleavened bread as the impetus for their survival. Positions of power and influence often require careful introspection and resolution to remain grounded and humble.

## TRUE CLOSENESS

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*“Moshe spoke to Aharon and his remaining sons, Elazar and Itamar, ‘Take the meal-offering that is left over from the fire-offerings of Hashem, and eat it unleavened near the Altar, for they are of superior holiness.’” (10:12)*

Moshe comforted Aharon over the loss of his two older sons, Nadav and Avihu, by pointing out that their death through Divine ecstasy showed that they were closer to G-d than Moshe or Aharon were.

Moshe was not exaggerating in order to comfort Aharon; on the other hand, he was also aware that Nadav and Avihu had not been privileged to communicate with G-d directly, as he had.

What Moshe meant, rather, was that whereas G-d had commanded him (and Aharon) to forego their personal, exalted spiritual state in order to lead the people and teach them the Torah, G-d had made no such demands on Nadav and Avihu. Therefore, they indeed remained “closer” to G-d than Moshe or Aharon were able to be.

Nonetheless, G-d subsequently made it clear that Nadav and Avihu’s approach was not meant to be a model for others. True closeness to G-d results from identifying with His purpose in creating the world: refining it and transforming it into His home, and inspiring and instructing others to do the same. (Hitva’aduyot 5724, vol. 2, pp. 395-399) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

## PREP TIME

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*“You shall eat it in a holy place, for it is your portion and the portion of your sons from the fire-offerings of Hashem, for so have I been commanded.” (10:13)*

The normal rules governing the behavior of the priests were suspended on the eighth day of the installation rites because the day’s essential message was that G-d can override His own rules. Whereas the number seven signifies the natural order, the number eight signifies the miraculous transcendence of natural order.

Nevertheless, there could not have been a miraculous eighth day of the Tabernacle’s inauguration without the preceding seven non-miraculous days. This is because G-d makes His miraculous intervention in life dependent upon us.

The ultimate transcendence of the natural order will occur in the Messianic era. The miraculous revelations of the future will be the result of the preparations we make now. As we continue to refine the world through natural means, we should bear in mind that the results of our efforts will be beyond whatever we can imagine. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

## MEANINGFUL MOVEMENTS

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*“And the breast of the waving and the thigh of the raising you are to eat in a pure place, you and your sons and your daughters with you; for they have been given as your portion and the portion of your sons from the sacrifices of the peace-offerings of the Children of Israel.” (10:14)*

The installation offerings were a type of peace-offering. All peace-offerings require “raising” and “waving”: the priest and the offeror must together hold specific parts of the animal and lift them, lower them, and then move them back and forth.

The vertical movements allude to our relationship with G-d: sometimes we ascend to great heights, and sometimes we suffer temporary descents or setbacks.

The horizontal movements allude to our relationship with our fellow human beings: sometimes we need to draw them close to us, and sometimes we need to push them away, encouraging them to assert their independence.

The fact that both the raising and lowering movements are part of the sacrifice indicates that we can remain conscious of G-d’s presence in our lives both when we are on the spiritual ascent and when we are suffering a setback.

The fact that both the back and forth movements are part of the sacrifice indicates that we must both teach this lesson to others and encourage them to develop their appreciation of it on their own. (Hitva’aduyot 5746, vol. 2, pp. 784, 787-790) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

## THINK IT OVER

### HaDerash VeHalyun

*“Moshe inquired insistently about the goat of the sin-offering, for behold, it had been burned – and he was wrathful with Elazar and Itamar, Aharon’s remaining sons...” (10:16)*

One of the principal causes of sin and violation of the Torah is rashness, the failure to make diligent inquiry to whether the action contemplated is permissible.

“To make diligent inquiry is half of the Torah” (Mesorah) - half of its observance depends upon careful deliberation before embarking on a course of action.

A similar thought is conveyed by the Psalmist’s words (Tehillim 10:13): “Why would the wicked man spurn G-d and say in his heart: ‘You will not call to account,’” which may also be rendered as “How does the wicked man anger G-d? He says in his heart: ‘Don’t call to account.’”

“Do not inquire so much,” the sinner says, in effect. Do not deliberate too carefully. Whatever you desire to do, act quickly and do not ask too many questions. Such rashness causes G-d to become angry, while “diligent inquiry” is conducive to the proper observance of the Torah.

## THE PERFECT BLEND

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*“Aharon said to Moshe, ‘See, this day they brought their sin-offering and their burnt-offering before G-d, and such things have befallen me! Had I eaten a [regular] sin-offering today, would it have pleased G-d?’” (10:19)*

Moshe and Aharon’s perspectives on the difference between the special sacrifices of the day and those that would be offered up on a regular basis reflect their emphases in our relationship with G-d. Moshe was devoted to transmitting G-d’s Torah to the people, whereas Aharon was devoted to elevating the people to the Torah.

The Torah is unchanging truth, whereas human beings are constantly changing. Moshe saw the Torah’s truth as being uniformly applicable in all situations, whereas Aharon realized that each situation must be assessed in order to know how to apply the Torah’s unchanging truth effectively. Aharon saw that a one-time sacrifice is different than one that would be offered up regularly, that G-d’s truth can be reflected differently in different contexts.

In our own lives, we must meld Moshe’s and Aharon’s perspectives. For ourselves, we must be like Moshe, devoted to the Torah’s absolute and unchanging truth. When interacting with others, we, like Aharon, must take into account their moods and inclinations, drawing them closer to the Torah through forgiving love. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 17, pp. 113-116) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## MESSANGER OF TRUTH

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*“And Moshe heard [Aharon’s explanation], and he approved.” (10:20)*

G-d instructed Aharon and his two surviving sons to eat their designated portions of the day’s sacrifices as an exception to the rule that priests in mourning may not eat sacrificial meat.

Moshe assumed that this exception applied to all the sacrifices of the day, while Aharon assumed that it applied only to the special sacrifices that were offered up exclusively on this unique day. When Aharon explained his perspective, Moshe agreed that he was right.

When Moshe heard Aharon’s reasoning, he acknowledged that it made more sense than his own, admitting that he had not received any direct instructions from G-d in the matter.

The obvious lesson for us in this episode is never to be afraid to admit the truth, even if doing so may prove to be embarrassing.

Moreover, we should admit the truth even if we might think that our social or religious standing obligates us not to. G-d Himself had appointed Moshe as the transmitter of the Torah, and it was therefore paramount that the people trust his integrity. Moshe was fully aware of this, and could have thought that admitting his own fallibility might compromise his authority as G-d’s messenger. But he correctly realized that, on the contrary, demonstrating his readiness to bow before the truth would only enhance the people’s respect for his message.

We, too, can be effective messengers of truth when we demonstrate that it means more to us than our esteem in the eyes of others. (Sichot Kodesh 5739, vol. 2, pp. 571-573) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## CONFIRMATION OF ACCEPTANCE

### Chasam Sofer

*“And Moshe heard [Aharon’s explanation], and he approved.” (10:20)*

Moshe was pleased with Aharon’s subdued reaction to his personal tragedy.

When Aharon “held his peace” (10:3) at the time of his two sons’ death, one could have attributed his silence not to resignation to G-d’s will but to grief and bitterness too powerful to express.

But when Moshe saw that Aharon’s mind was clear enough to be able to discuss laws, make distinctions between them and render decisions superior to his own, Moshe was satisfied that Aharon’s silence was not due to the numbness of shock and grief, and he was pleased that his brother had so calmly and willingly accepted Heaven’s decree.

## PREPARING FOR PROPHECY

### Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

*"G-d spoke to Moshe and to Aharon, saying to them, 'Speak to the Children of Israel, saying: These are the creatures that you may eat from among all the animals of the land...' (11:1-2)*

We should examine why the verse states, "saying to them," which seems to be superfluous, since the very next words direct Moshe and Aharon to speak to the Jewish people. It appears that we can understand the meaning of this phrase by citing Rashi's comments on the passage regarding Miriam's question to Pharaoh's daughter (Shemos 2:7), "Shall I go and call a wet nurse for you from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" Rashi remarks: "This teaches us that she had taken him around to many Egyptian women to nurse, but he did not nurse from any of them because he was destined to speak with the *Shechinah* in the future" (see Sotah 12b; Shemos Rabbah 1:25). Moshe, as a newborn, refused to suckle from the impure Egyptian wet nurses since he was destined to prophesy to the Jewish nation as the messenger of the *Shechinah*.

The Ramban (Vayikra 11:13) explains that the Torah prohibited us from eating these impure types of animals because doing so instills cruel traits in a person's physical being. The Jewish people - a holy nation - must cultivate the trait of kindness. Furthermore, in the future, G-d will speak with every Jew (Tanchuma, Mikeitz 2), as the verse states, "Your sons and daughters shall prophesy..." (Yoel 3:1). Since they are destined to converse with the Almighty, how is it possible for someone who has eaten impure food to converse with the *Shechinah*?

This is what our verse alludes to with the words "saying to them": Since in the future I will be "saying to them" - i.e., conversing with each and every individual - they must not eat impure creatures.

## BON APPETIT

### Rabbi Yehonatan Eybeschutz

*"These are the creatures that you may eat from among all the animals of the land..." (11:2)*

The *Kohanim* (the priests) were considered more scholarly than the rest of the Jewish people. This was attributed to the fact that they consumed meats of the animal that had been brought as a sacrifice in the Temple, and as a result, their food was saturated with sparks of holiness.

G-d, in His infinite wisdom, shared with us which foods are kosher and which are not kosher. Kosher food is beneficial for our spiritual well-being, while non-kosher food is considered detrimental to our spiritual state. Non-kosher food is for the soul what poison is for the body. - Rabbi Yacov Berber

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The saying "You are what you eat" means that it is important to eat good food in order to be healthy and fit. Nutrients from the foods we eat provide the foundation of the structure, function, and wholeness of every cell in our body - from the skin, hair, and bones to the muscles, digestive system, and immune system.

"You are what you eat" is correct from a spiritual sense as well. G-d, in His infinite wisdom, knows what foods are spiritually healthy for us and those that are not.

When a doctor treats a patient with blocked arteries, one of the first steps the doctor will take is to modify the person's diet. They will encourage the patient to increase their eating of avocados and asparagus, among others as both are considered to be natural artery-clearing.

We all understand that if someone wants to become an elite athlete, it is important they follow a regimented diet to enhance their ability to perform at the highest level.

We all have, in a sense, spiritual arteries that allow us to absorb holiness and spirituality. By eating non-kosher food, we are blocking our spiritual arteries, and it becomes very difficult to receive and absorb holiness. And by eating kosher food, this will enhance our spiritual self and we will be primed for spiritual greatness. We are what we eat, in more ways than one. - Rabbi Yacov Berber

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If we eat to be healthy and use our good health to serve G-d, then the mundane act of eating becomes a holy endeavor and the food consumed becomes elevated to a higher spiritual plane.

A person who eats simply because he enjoys the food or because he wants to have the energy to indulge in personal pleasure is no better than an animal. Animals also eat because they like the food and need the energy to pursue their desires.

Life's experiences can be divided into three categories: black, white, and gray. Black represents all forbidden acts, such as stealing. White signifies all acts that we are obligated in doing, such as giving charity. And gray represents everything in between, acts that are neither sinful nor obligatory.

Most of our lives are spent in the gray zone. However, we have the ability to turn gray into white. We can elevate the mundane and the ordinary to make it holy.

Most of our waking hours are spent trying to make a living. What we do with our hard-earned incomes will very much impact in which category all those hours will end up. Will they stay in the gray, or will they be elevated to the white? If we use our disposable earnings to indulge in personal pleasure, then the many hours we spent working will remain ordinary and mundane. If, however, we use those funds to help those less fortunate than ourselves, our working hours will be elevated and viewed as a noble and righteous endeavor. - Rabbi Yacov Berber



## RESTORING HIDDEN SPARKS

### Baal Shem Tov

*"These are the creatures that you may eat from among all the animals of the land..." (11:2)*

A king lost a precious diamond that had been set in his ring. Despite having scores of servants, officers, nobles, dukes, and military personnel at his service, he did not command them to search for his gem.

Instead, he commanded his only son to conduct the search. The king knew that his officers were highly capable and guaranteed to succeed, but he wished to credit his precious son with the jewel's recovery.

The king aided his son by dropping hints, because the gem was not truly lost. It had been planted to justify a search, so as to bring merit to his son. The king longed to delight in his son's success, take pride in his accomplishment, and exclaim, "See! No one was able to find it except for my son!"

This parable allows us to recognize that G-d deliberately created a universe with sparks of holiness trapped within materiality, so that He could instruct His son, the Jewish people, to find them and restore them to Him. In particular, they achieve this through eating food that is kosher.

You might feel drawn to food and drink out of hunger and thirst, but in truth, it is your soul that is attracted to the sparks of holiness trapped within food and drink, because you have received a mission of redeeming these particular sparks. G-d gave us a clear set of instructions as to how we must use and interact with materiality. These are hints, pointing to the sparks that form the basis of our mission. He did not offer these instructions to the countless angels; rather, He lovingly planted the sparks on earth, especially for us.

## LEAVING AN OPENING

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*"You may eat any animal that has split hooves which are completely separated, and that chews its cud." (11:3)*

A split hoof is one of the signs of a kosher animal. Symbolically, this implies that even if a person finds himself living an animalistic existence, he can always find a way to return to G-d and live as a human being.

A completely closed hoof, however, denotes the tendency to remain at an animalistic, subhuman level. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 442-88)

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These two signs of a kosher animal correspond to the qualities that can help a person return to G-d.

A closed hoof represents a closed atmosphere, where nothing enters. A split hoof has an opening - i.e., an inner, tranquil atmosphere - which can be entered, even from the lowest of levels (the feet or hooves).

The chewing of the cud returns food that has descended into the animal's stomach back towards its head; this indicates that a person is returning to *da'at* - to intellect - rather than following his animalistic tendencies. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 88-45a).

## KOSHER HOSTING

### Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

*"You may eat any animal that has split hooves which are completely separated, and that chews its cud." (11:3)*

The two most prominent characteristics of a kosher animal are split hooves and that it chews its cud. Interestingly, the words "*parsah* - hoof" and "*geirah* - cud" have a double meaning. "*Parsah*" can also mean a slice of bread while "*geirah*" can also refer to an ancient coin with the weight of one-twentieth of a shekel. This, say the *sefarim*, is an allusion to two important *mitzvos*: charity and welcoming guests.

R' Meir of Premishlan zt'l enlightens us in the following manner. The camel and the pig are both non-kosher animals and may not be eaten. The camel, says the Torah, "chews its cud but does not split its hoof." The pig is just the opposite; it "has split hooves but does not chew its cud." In order for an animal to be considered kosher, it must have both of these qualifications. Likewise, when a Jew invites a guest into his home, he must ensure that his guest is perfectly comfortable. The *halachah* states that a host should always cut several slices of bread from his loaf in case the guest would like more but is too embarrassed to cut for himself. The host must also partake of enough food to encourage his guest to eat without self-consciousness. This is alluded to in the *pasuk*. The camel "chews its cud" - eats enough to encourage guests, but does not "split its hoof" - share its bread with others. The reverse holds true for the pig. So, too, only a host who fulfills both requirements is "kosher."

From this we learn that one of the primary distinguishing marks of a Jew is that he willingly shares his bread with the poor and distributes charity freely.

## SEPERATION AND DELIBERATION

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"You may eat any animal that has split hooves which are completely separated, and that chews its cud." (11:3)*

The first sign of a kosher animal is its split foot. The foot both touches the ground and separates us from the ground. It therefore alludes to the notion that in our involvement with the physical world, we must remain separate from it, aloof in our dealings with materiality.

The fact that the foot must be split alludes to the notion that there must be an opening in this barrier: We must make sure that the light of holiness permeates even the most mundane aspects of creation, and make sure to retain Divine consciousness even when we are involved in the mundane aspects of our lives.

The other sign of kosher land animals is rumination. This alludes to the necessity of deliberating before engaging the mundane aspects of life. First, we must weigh our intentions, ensuring that they are solely toward elevating the world, purging them of any desire to simply indulge in sensuality for its own sake. Second, we must weigh the methods we employ in elevating the world, ensuring that they conform to the guidelines set forth in the Torah. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 1, pp. 224-226) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

## **FALSE ADVERTISING**

### **Rabbi Moshe Kormornick**

*"But this is what you shall not eat from those that chew the cud or have split hooves; the camel, though it chews the cud, its hoof is not split - it is impure for you." (11:4)*

The Kli Yakar points out that the phrase "the camel, though it chews the cud" in the above verse is inappropriately placed. Since the verse tells us the reason why we cannot eat this animal, why does it begin by stating a reason that we can eat it - the verse should have said "But this is what you shall not eat from those that chew the cud or have split hooves; the camel, for its hoof is not split [even] though it chews the cud." Why is the camel's "Kosher sign" written first, or even at all?

The Kli Yakar answers that the phrase "it chews the cud" is actually not coming to explain its "Kosher sign" rather the exact opposite. The fact that the camel chews the cud - its "Kosher sign" - is precisely what makes it even more *treif*, because pretending to be good when in fact you are not, is a terrible character trait, worse than someone wicked who at least openly acts wickedly. (This principle can also be learned from Rashi [Bereishis 37:4] when he praises Yosef's brothers for "not speaking one thing with their mouth and another in their heart" when they were "not able to speak with him [Yosef] peacefully"; they acted with open honesty, not pretending to behave in a way that was not a genuine reflection of their feelings towards Yosef.)

Therefore, the Kli Yakar explains that this sort of animal is worse to eat as it represents more of a danger to the Jewish people who may be tricked by its "Kosher sign."

## **FINS AND SCALES**

### **Reb Noson of Breslov**

*"Of everything that is in the water, this is what you can eat. You can eat anything that has fins and scales, whether in the water, the seas, or the rivers." (11:9)*

For a fish to be kosher, it must have both fins and scales. There are fish that have fins but do not have scales. But every fish that has scales has fins, too. If so, why does the Torah even mention fins? In order to magnify the Torah and glorify it. (Niddah 51b)

This teaching demonstrates that even things that are not absolutely applicable to Torah law can also be sanctified and elevated into holiness. People ask, "Why did G-d give us so many *mitzvos*, making it difficult to observe the Torah?" In fact, G-d wanted us to become absolutely pure, and the only way to attain that level is through Torah study and the performance of good deeds. Then, even seemingly simple deeds can become a vehicle for attaining purity. This concept mirrors the devotion of the *tzaddikim*, who transform mundane acts into holy acts. And it also explains why the Torah contains many stories, which show how the Patriarchs served G-d even in their everyday acts. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 150)

For a fish to be kosher, it must have both fins and scales. There are fish that have fins but do not have scales. But every fish that has scales, has fins, too. (Niddah 51b)

*Tzaddikim* are compared to fish; charity is compared to water. Unlike animals which require *shechitah* (ritual slaughter), fish do not require *shechitah*. Symbolically, *tzaddikim* are pure and do not require rectification, and charity is an act of purity symbolizing the rectification of the soul.

The signs of a kosher fish are fins and scales. "Scales" refer to charity, which is a suit of armor that protects a person, as in "He dressed in charity as in armor" (Yeshayahu 59:17), and "He dressed him in a garment of armor" (I Shmuel 17:38). Anyone who gives charity merits to this type of garment. The word *tzaddik* (צדיק, righteous person) comes from the same root as *tzedakah* (צדקה, charity), connecting the concepts of purity and protection. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 148)

*Snapir* (סנפיר, fins) is similar to *Snapirin* (סנפירין, bright light) - the material of which the Second Tablets were made (Rashi on Shemos 34:1). Fins represent the light of the intellect that a person attains. Scales, on the other hand, represent a *tzitzum* (constriction) of the intellect (scales are coverings of the skin, conceptually a "concealment" or "constriction") - since a person must take care not to exceed the bounds of his intellectual capacity. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 71a)

Deep waters are the counsel in a man's heart. (Mishlei 18:4)

The phrase "swimming in deep waters" implies acting on advice, much as people travel from place to place according to the counsel they receive. The way to swim in those waters are with fins, similar to the way fish navigate in the sea. The fins of a fish are called *Snapir* (סנפיר, alluding to the Second Tablets which were made of *Snapirin* (סנפירין, bright light) (Rashi on Shemos 34:1) - meaning that the ability to navigate depends on one's acceptance of the advice of the Torah.

However, not every fish that has fins is kosher, because some advice is wrong and improper. The main sign of a kosher fish is its scales, which represent a constriction of intellect. By properly focusing upon one's goal, a person can use his intellect correctly to find the right advice.

## **BOLD HUMILITY**

### **Reb Noson of Breslov**

*"These shall you abominate from among the fowl, they may not be eaten – they are an abomination..." (11:13)*

We The round end of an egg represents humility. The oval or "sharp" end of an egg represents boldness and brazenness. A kosher egg is a combination of round and oval, alluding to the Jew who acts humbly before those who are G-d-fearing, yet stands up boldly to those who try to obstruct his devotions to G-d.

An egg that is completely round corresponds to a person who has holy humility - that is, he acts humbly before those who are G-d-fearing, but he also behaves humbly before those who obstruct him. Being humble when he should be brazen makes him unable to fulfill his devotions to G-d. An egg that is oval in shape represents a person who has holy boldness - that is, he is willing to stand up to those who oppose his devotions, but he also acts brazenly towards G-d-fearing people.

It is possible that a person could have impure humility and unholy boldness. Therefore, the only way to ascertain that an egg is kosher is by tradition - just as we can see if a person is "kosher" by whether or not he follows Jewish tradition. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 180)

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We are permitted to eat the egg of a kosher bird, but not the egg of a non-kosher bird. If an egg is completely oval or completely round, it is from a non-kosher bird. If one end is curved while the other end is oval, it could be from a kosher bird. [Notwithstanding this sign,] we must have the testimony of a trapper who has a tradition that the bird that laid this egg is kosher, before we can eat it. (Yoreh Dei'ah 85)

The oval or "sharp" end of an egg alludes to the Oral Law, for the Talmud is constructed of questions and sharp retorts that clarify the issues it raises. The round end of an egg corresponds to the Written Law, since the Hebrew word *kad* (round) has a numerical value of 24, paralleling the twenty-four books of the Tanakh (the Written Law). To be considered kosher, an egg must have a round end and an oval end, corresponding to the Written and Oral Laws, respectively.

If an egg is completely round, it represents the Written Law without the Oral Law, which is unacceptable and therefore not kosher. If an egg is completely oval, it represents a tradition based on the Oral Law which is laden with questions and sharp retorts that are totally unrelated to Torah thought. Therefore, eggs that are completely round or completely oval are non-kosher.

## **COME ONE, COME ALL**

### **Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman**

*"These shall you abominate from among the fowl, they may not be eaten – they are an abomination... the chasidah..." (11:13-19)*

Why is the stork called "*chasidah*" (kindly one)? Because it deals kindly with other creatures with regard to food. (Rashi)

According to the Ramban, birds labeled as impure have been classified this way because of their cruelty. But why should the stork, which deals kindly with its fellow creatures, be classified as impure? It is because it is kind only to others of its species but will never give food to a creature not of its own kind. This teaches us that when giving food to the needy, we must make no distinction between friend and stranger.

## **KINDNESS TO ALL**

### **Rabbi Avi Wiesenfeld**

*"These shall you abominate from among the fowl, they may not be eaten – they are an abomination... the chasidah..." (11:13-19)*

In this week's Parshah the Torah lists the kosher and non-kosher animals and birds. There is a particular non-kosher bird called the *chasidah* which is forbidden to eat. Rashi explains that it is called "*chasidah*" from the word *chessed* - for it performs acts of kindness by sharing its food with other birds of its kind.

Rav Yisrael of Ruzhin asks the obvious question. If this bird is called a *chasidah* because of the acts of kindness it performs, why is it not a kosher bird? Why is a bird with such a fine character trait not kosher?

The profound answer provides us with insight into what true *chessed* is. Rashi specifically states that the *chasidah* does *chessed* "with birds of its kind," with birds that appear to be similar to it. That is the bird's shortcoming. Real kindness, the type of kindness which is truly an exemplary trait to emulate, is kindness performed for anyone in need, non-denominationaly.

When one is kind to another person regardless of the way he looks, acts, or speaks, and does not differentiate between cultures and levels of observance, that is the type of kindness that the Torah requires of us. For this reason, the *chasidah* is specifically not a kosher animal - to teach us about the proper approach to *chessed*.

It was during this week, Parshas Shemini, 5782, that we witnessed the true *chessed* that characterizes the Jewish people, as hundreds of thousands of Jews from all types of backgrounds and levels of observance came together to show profound respect to the revered Sar ha'Torah, Rav Chaim Kanievsky zt"l. Throughout the crowded streets of Bnei Brak where throngs of Jews streamed from all parts of the country, one could see inspiring acts of true *chesed* being carried out.



The local residents set up tables outside their buildings, stocked with drinking water, hot-water kettles and coffee, and freshly-baked pastries for the tired, hungry, and thirsty. Tissues were handed out to whoever needed, and chairs were brought out to provide rest for the many people walking and standing on their feet for many hours. It made no difference whether one was wearing a black hat or white hat or no hat, the color of one's shirt, or what language one spoke. The kindness was overflowing and heart-warming to witness, demonstrating what real *chessed* is all about.

## MISPLACED KINDNESS

### Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

*"These shall you abominate from among the fowl, they may not be eaten – they are an abomination... the racham... the chasidah..." (11:13-19)*

The Torah names several non-kosher birds, which most commentators assert are not kosher due to their aggressive nature or eating habits. However, two of the birds listed have names that seem to indicate virtuous qualities. The *racham*, which means "merciful," and the *chasidah*, which means "kind one." Why are these birds, named for mercy and kindness, included in the list of birds prohibited from consumption?

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig points out that mercy and kindness can be misplaced and inappropriate. Compassion can be misplaced when applied to evil people, and kindness can be inappropriate when one constantly highlights their own kindness to others. Virtues are meant to fuel us internally, not be flaunted to others.

We are granted the talents, tendencies, virtues, and opportunities to use them; choosing how we use them makes all the difference.

## THE SEARCH FOR PURITY

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*"These are the creeping things that teem upon the earth which are impure for you: the weasel, the mouse and the toad." (11:29)*

The weasel is called a *Choled*, which is similar to *Cheled* (i.e., this world). An impure animal that resides in the recesses of a house, the weasel represents the concealment of the spiritual, much as the material world conceals spirituality and gives rise to impurity.

The essence of our life in this world is based on concealment, for if the reward or punishment for our actions were obvious, there would be no free choice. One who sets his sights on spirituality and searches for G-d and truth can avoid the impurity of this world. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 12a)

## VALUABLE CONTENTS

### Rabbi Moshe Schochet

*"Any earthenware utensil into whose interior one of them will fall, everything in it shall become impure and you shall break it." (11:33)*

The Torah teaches us that an earthenware vessel becomes impure only on the inside but not on the outside. The Kotzker Rebbe (Ohel Torah) explains that unlike a metal utensil, which has intrinsic value, an earthenware vessel has no innate worth. Rather, it only has value by virtue of its contents. Therefore, an earthenware utensil can only become impure when it has impurity inside of it.

The Kotzker Rebbe explains further that an earthenware vessel is analogous to a human being. A person's body is worthless without content. Our physical existence only has value when we fill it with spirituality. If we cruise through life, never attempting to fill ourselves with Torah and *mitzvos*, then we, like the earthenware vessel, have no worth.

The Kotzker Rebbe is conveying a powerful lesson, one that carries great responsibility. Hashem has given us a physical body that has the capacity to house Hashem's Presence. However, it is incumbent upon us, by observing the Torah, to ensure that our bodies and environments are befitting for the *Shechinah* to reside in. Let us assess ourselves and our behaviors in order to ensure that we increase our spiritual value and worth.

## CLEANSING WATERS

### Reb Noson of Breslov

*"Only a spring or a cistern, a gathering of water, will remain ritually pure..." (11:36)*

A *mikvah* must contain forty *se'ah* of water (about 140 gallons). These forty *se'ah* correspond to the forty days that Moshe ascended to Heaven to receive the Torah. Like the Torah, a *mikvah* possesses incredible powers of purification (see Yoma 85b). (Likutey Halakhot VII. p. 20a)

The *mikvah* represents the waters of Creation. By immersing in the *mikvah*, a person returns to his source, to the state of perfection that existed prior to the creation of man. (ibid., IV, p. 280)

## ALWAYS CONNECTED

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"But if water is put upon a seed and then their carcass falls upon it, it is impure to you." (11:38)*

A plant used for food cannot become susceptible to ritual defilement if it is still attached to the ground - by even the smallest root (Mishneh Torah, Tumas Ochalin 1:1, 2:1).

Allegorically, “defilement” is feeling distant from G-d, and “holiness” is feeling close to G-d. In this context, the one precaution we can take to immunize ourselves against the defilement of spiritual depression is to remain rooted to our source - to the essence of our Divine soul. The essence of our soul never becomes defiled, for it is constantly united with G-d.

When we rouse the essence of our soul from its dormancy - by reminding ourselves of our inner connection to G-d - and manifest it in all of our thoughts, words, and deeds, we can actualize our full spiritual potential - joyfully, optimistically, and energetically. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 27, pp. 74-78) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **WORMING THOUGHTS**

### **Reb Noson of Breslov**

*“Any creeping thing that teems upon the earth is detestable; it should not be eaten.” (11:41)*

The prohibition against eating worms and insects applies only to those creatures that appear upon the earth. Those that form within the fruit are permitted, as long as they never left the fruit. (Yoreh Dei’ah 84:4)

The earth represents the lowest of all levels. The worms and insects that are attracted to it are compared to the snake that slithers upon the ground (as do worms), for they are conceptually a part of the polluted concept of earth. People are naturally disgusted by the thought of eating insects, for they represent severe spiritual pollution. Yet these creatures have no intrinsic power. Although they cause everything they touch to spoil and decay, they can be defeated easily.

This knowledge can empower us to overcome all evil thoughts and material lusts that “worm” their way into our consciousness. As they are drawn from a source of spiritual pollution, these thoughts and lusts are easily defeated. We must always take care not to allow them to spread. They must be contained within our minds, similar to the worm that is permissible to eat as long as it never leaves the fruit. For once the worm “sets foot” upon the earth - once a person allows his mind to wander outside the realm of the spiritual - it becomes totally forbidden.

## **RISING ABOVE EVIL**

### **Lubavitcher Rebbe**

*“All that goes on its belly... among all the creeping things that creep upon the earth, you may not eat them, for they are an abomination.” (11:42)*

The Zohar (1:35b) compares the snake to the evil inclination (the *yetzer hara*). The evil inclination is smart: it does not immediately suggest that we “crawl on our belly” and bury ourselves in earthliness. It begins by suggesting that we walk with a “lowered head,” that we forget G-d who is above us, neglecting as well the higher purposes of life. This eventually leads us to forget our purpose altogether.

The antidote to the snake’s schemes is to immerse ourselves in the study of the Torah, especially the inner dimension of Torah, which lifts us into a realm that the snake cannot reach. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 17, p. 122) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

## **FOR HEAVEN’S SAKE**

### **Rabbi Moshe Feinstein**

*“For I am Hashem, Who elevated you out from the land of Egypt to be a God unto you; you shall be holy, for I am holy.” (11:45)*

Had I redeemed the Children of Israel from Egypt only for this purpose, that they do not contaminate themselves [through the consumption of reptiles], it would have sufficed. (Bava Metzia 61b)

This is puzzling, because to most gentiles there is nothing unseemly about eating insects, rodents or reptiles. Even among Jews, the only reason for not consuming these insects is that they are prohibited by the Torah. In fact, if someone eats certain *sheratzim* which are permitted, he has not sinned.

Although a Jew refrains from eating *sheratzim* because they are disgusting, it is, nevertheless, clear that the extreme caution which we exercise is due to the Scriptural prohibition. Even if our extreme caution is due to their repugnance, perhaps an ulterior motive, nevertheless, the fact is that ultimately the reason that we do not consume them is because of the *aveirah*.

Accordingly, the meaning of the rabbinic dictum (Nazir 23b) מתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה, “The performance of a *mitzvah* not for its own sake will bring about its performance for its own sake,” is that not only will one come to perform the *mitzvah* for its own sake, but even now when he is fulfilling it, he is doing so for its own sake. The other motives are merely the catalyst that causes one to desire to fulfill the *mitzvah*. When one is actually performing it, it is *lishmah*, for its own sake.

## **ELEVATED HOLINESS**

### **Rabbi Aryeh Dachs**

*“For I am Hashem, Who elevated you out from the land of Egypt to be a God unto you; you shall be holy, for I am holy.” (11:45)*

A few years ago, just before Pesach, I took our car in for a car wash. While waiting, I got into a conversation with the attendant, a young man of Pakistani descent. He shared that he was amazed by the success of the Jewish community in America following the Holocaust. As I was leaving, he looked at me sternly and said, “Don’t forget, you are a descendant of David.”

This experience was one of many where an outsider seemed more keenly in touch with the significant status of the Jewish nation than members of “the tribe” themselves.

The end of Parashas Shemini touches on our own need to appreciate our distinct and lofty status. The Torah delineates the animals we are permitted to eat and delineates the animals that are forbidden. The Torah goes into great detail here, which points to the significance of these laws in particular.

The Rambam, when outlining the laws of forbidden foods, writes that a father must ensure that his young child does not consume forbidden non-kosher foods. Although there may not be a technical *halachic* issue with a young child eating forbidden foods, it is imperative that the father do his utmost to make sure that the child maintains the kosher laws. The reasoning the Rambam provides is fascinating. He says that the father must do so to train/educate his son in matters of *kedushah*, holiness. (*Kedushah* implies a holiness specifically achieved by way of separation.)

Notably, the Rambam does not say that the father is obligated to train his son so that he becomes accustomed to the law. Rather, we must train our children in matters of *kedushah*. The implication is that before we educate our children to keep the laws of the Torah, we must teach them that we are different; we are a holy people and therefore must live on a higher plane. When we tell our children that they may not eat certain foods, we impart this message to them. They are special and holy, *kadosh*, and to maintain that status they mustn't partake in all that is available.

The importance of understanding our status as a lofty people, in accordance with the laws prohibiting the consumption of non-kosher animals, is alluded to at the end of Parashas Shemini as well. The Almighty instructs us, even implores us, not to defile ourselves by consuming insects and the like. The explanation for this law is given in the next verse, "For I, G-d, elevated [was *ma'aleh*] you out of Egypt." When warning against eating insects, the Torah describes the Exodus from Egypt as an exaltedness; when we were redeemed from Egypt we changed. We became separate, set apart from the rest of the world. Underlying our observance of the laws of kosher is the expression of our understanding that we are elevated. When we distance ourselves from impure, non-kosher food, we live the message expressed by my car wash attendant: We are a special people.

## DISPLAY OF AFFECTION

### Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

*"For distinguishing between the impure and the pure, and between the creature that may be eaten and the creature that may not be eaten." (11:47)*

Our parashah concludes with a decisive statement: "animals that may be eaten and animals that may not be eaten" (11:47). While kosher animals are described as edible, non-kosher animals are not "inedible" but instead prohibited from being consumed.

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig points to this as a significant distinction. We may be tempted to justify certain laws as humane, logical, and even healthy, and those attributes may be true. However, the ultimate reason we follow the rules in the Torah is that they are what G-d has commanded. Rather than paring our actions to deliberate, logical acts, we should strive to do things for the sake of our relationships as a beautiful display of affection for G-d and for those whom we love.

## SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE

### Lubavitcher Rebbe

*"For distinguishing between the impure and the pure, and between the creature that may be eaten and the creature that may not be eaten." (11:47)*

Spiritually, this decree refers to making the moral distinction between what is acceptable, healthy behavior and what is not. This distinction is easy enough when matters are clear and obvious. But all too often, the distinction is blurred, and what is in fact defiled can easily be taken as being undefiled.

By studying the Torah, we remain connected to G-d, who is not subject to the limited reach of human intellect. Thus, attuned to Divine consciousness, we instinctively know what is spiritually healthy and what is not. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 7, pp. 72-73) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

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