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Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Shemini (Leviticus 9:1-11:47)
Between Hope and Humanity (Shemini 5779)
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

It should have been the great day of celebration. The Tabernacle, Israel's first collective house of worship, was complete. All preparations had been made. For seven days, Moses had performed the inauguration. Now, the eighth day, the first of Nissan, had arrived. The Priests, led by Aaron, were ready to begin their service.

It was then that tragedy occurred. Two of Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, brought "strange fire, which [God] had not commanded them." Fire "came forth from the Lord" and they died. There then follow two scenes between Moses and Aaron. The first:

Moses then said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord spoke of when He said, 'Among those who are near to Me I will show Myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honoured.'" Aaron remained silent. (Lev. 10:3)

Moses then commanded their bodies to be removed, and forbade Aaron and his remaining sons to engage in rituals of mourning. He gave them further instructions to prevent such tragedies from occurring in the future, and then proceeded to check whether the sacrifices of the day had been performed. He discovered that Aaron and his sons had burned the sin offering, instead of eating it as prescribed:

When Moses inquired about the goat of the sin offering and found that it had been burned up, he was angry with Eleazar and Itamar, Aaron's remaining sons, and asked, "Why didn't you eat the sin offering in the Sanctuary area? It is most holy; it was given to you to take away the guilt of the community by making atonement for them before the Lord. Since its blood was not taken into the Holy Place, you should have eaten the goat in the Sanctuary area, as I commanded."

Aaron replied to Moses, "Today they sacrificed their sin offering and their burnt offering before the Lord, but such things as this have happened to me.

Would the Lord have been pleased if I had eaten the sin offering today?"

When Moses heard this, he approved. (Lev. 10:16-20)

Without going into the details of these exchanges, their psychology is enthralling. Moses tries to comfort his brother, who has lost two of his sons. He tells him that God has said, "Among those who are near to Me, I will show Myself holy." According to Rashi, he said, "Now I see that they [Nadav and Avihu] were greater than you and me." The holier the person, the more God demands of them.

It is as if Moses said to Aaron: "My brother, do not give up now. We have come so far. We have climbed so high. I know your heart is broken. So is mine. Did we not think – you and I – that our troubles were behind us, that after all we suffered in Egypt, and at the Red Sea, and in the battle against Amalek, and in the sin of the Golden Calf, we were finally safe and free? And now this has happened. Aaron, don't give up, don't lose faith, don't despair. Your children died not because they were evil but because they were holy. Though their act was wrong, their intentions were good. They merely tried too hard." But despite Moses' words of consolation, "Aaron remained silent," lost in a grief too deep for words.

In the second exchange, Moses is concerned with something else – the community, whose sins should have been atoned for by the sin offering. It is as if he had said to Aaron: "My brother, I know you are in a state of grief. But you are not just a private person. You are also the High Priest. The people need you to perform your duties, whatever your inner feelings." Aaron replies: "Would the Lord have been pleased if I had eaten the sin offering today?" We can only guess at the precise import of these words. Perhaps they mean this: "I know that in general, a High Priest is forbidden to mourn as if he were an ordinary individual. That is the law, and I accept it. But had I acted on this inaugural day as if nothing had happened, as if my sons had not died, would this not seem to the people as if I were heartless, as if human life and death meant nothing, as if the service of God meant a renunciation of my humanity?" This time, Moses is silent. Aaron is right, and Moses knows it.

In this exchange between two brothers, a momentous courage is born: the courage of an Aaron who has the strength to grieve and not accept any easy consolation, and the courage of a Moses who has the strength to keep going in spite of grief. It is almost as if we are present at the birth of an emotional configuration that will characterise the Jewish people in centuries to come. Jews are a people who have had more than their share of suffering. Like Aaron, they did not lose their humanity. They did not allow their sense of grief to be dulled, deadened, desensitised. But neither did they lose their capacity to continue, to carry on, to hope. Like Moses, they never lost faith in God. But like Aaron, they never allowed that faith to anaesthetise their feelings, their human vulnerability.

That, it seems to me, is what happened to the Jewish people after the Holocaust. There were, and are, no words to silence the grief or end the tears. We may say – as Moses said to Aaron – that the victims were innocent, holy, that they died al kiddush Hashem, "in sanctification of God's name." Surely that is true. Yet nonetheless, "Aaron remained silent." When all the explanations and consolations have been given, grief remains, unassuaged. We would not be human were it otherwise. That, surely, is the message of the book of Job. Job's comforters were pious in their intentions, but God preferred Job's grief to their vindication of tragedy.

Yet, like Moses, the Jewish people found the strength to continue, to reaffirm hope in the face of despair, life in the presence of death. A mere three years after coming eye to eye with the Angel of Death, the Jewish people, by establishing the State of Israel, made the single most powerful affirmation in two thousand years that Am Yisrael Chai, the Jewish people lives.

Moses and Aaron were like the two hemispheres of the Jewish brain: human emotion on the one hand, faith in God, the covenant, and the future on the other. Without the second, we would have lost our hope. Without the first, we would have lost our humanity. It is not easy to keep that balance, that

tension. Yet it is essential. Faith does not render us invulnerable to tragedy but it gives us the strength to mourn and then, despite everything, to carry on.

Shabbat shalom

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Weekly Parsha SHMINI

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

We are all aware that personal disappointments and tragedies are unavoidable events in the life span of human beings. No one departs from this world unscathed by difficulties. In the Torah reading of this week we are informed of the death of the two elder sons of Aaron. The Torah ascribes their deaths to the fact that they offered up a strange fire on the altar in the process of burning the holy incense.

The commentators to the Torah over the ages have searched for an understanding of what their sin was and how the punishment fit the crime. It would be no exaggeration to state that in spite of these valiant scholarly efforts, the entire incident is still shrouded in mystery and beyond ordinary rational understanding.

Because of this, the Torah itself, almost cryptically, accepts Aaron's reaction of silence as being a correct and appropriate reaction to this tragedy. One would therefore be led to believe that this tragic moment in the life of Aaron and his family marked the end of his public career and his service to the Jewish people. It would apparently be understandable to many if Aaron had simply retired and left the priesthood for others to service and administer. I think that this is part of the message why the Torah emphasizes that all of this took place on the eighth day. The eighth day is always representative of continuity in Jewish life. It is the day of circumcision and it is the day when the seven-day period of mourning is over. The eighth day looks to the future and is always seen as a day of recovery and rejuvenation.

The history of the Jewish people, just as is true in the lives of individuals, has many instances of tragedy and disappointment. Yet the overall impression that Jewish history should leave with those who study it, is the great resilience that our story represents. Our story is one of the eighth day and not merely of the seven days of mourning and sadness.

Aaron and his descendants are remembered and revered until today for their continual blessings and service to the Jewish people, both in Temple times and thereafter. Rising from his personal tragedy, Aaron becomes the most beloved of Jewish leaders and the symbol of harmony, tolerance and true piety for all time.

The rabbis of the Mishnah encouraged us all to become students and disciples of Aaron and to emulate his ways and attitudes. We are to appreciate his silence in reaction to tragedy and to be inspired by his resilience and continuity in public service in spite of his personal loss and grief. This is a lesson that is true for us not only on a personal scale but on a national one as well.

The last century has been a tragic one for the Jewish people. But it has proven to be a time of great resilience and untold accomplishment. We should always remember that no matter what our situation may be today we will always attempt to live and be successful on the eighth day.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

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Shemini: The Error of Nadav and Avihu Rav Kook Torah

In the midst of the great public joy during the Tabernacle dedication, tragedy struck the family of the Kohen Gadol:

"Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, each took his fire pan, placed fire on it and then incense. They offered before God a strange fire that God had not instructed them. Fire came forth from before God and consumed them, and they died before God." (Lev. 10:1-2)

Why did Nadav and Avihu die? What was their sin?

Chochmah and Binah

The Kabbalists explained that Nadav and Avihu erred by separating the spiritual realm of binah (insight) from the higher realm of chochmah (wisdom). To understand this statement, we must first clarify the concepts of chochmah and binah.

Chochmah is the very essence of holiness. It is pure awareness, a flash of intuitive understanding. This lofty perception contains the splendor of sublime ideals at their highest level, before they are applied to the detailed characteristics of reality. Compared to the infinite expanse of chochmah, all else is small and inconsequential.

Below chochmah lies the spiritual realm of binah. Binah is an elaboration and extension of chochmah. This realm is created when the light of chochmah is ready to realize the ideals that govern finite content, enabling the formation of worlds and souls. Binah reflects reality in its most idealized form. It corresponds to the sublime purpose of creation and the culmination of life.

Exquisite beauty and delight are revealed in the realm of binah.

Enlightenment through prophecy emanates from this realm. The absolute holiness of chochmah, on the other hand, transcends all forms of spiritual pleasure.

Israel draws its inner spirit from the transcendent realm of chochmah. As the Zohar states, "Oraita me-chochmah nafkat" - the Torah emanates from chochmah. The source of Israel's faith is beyond all spiritual delight, beyond all ideals. Ideals belong to the realm of binah. Ultimately, they restrict our aspirations and are unable to provide an absolute and constant level of morality.

Separating Binah from Chochmah

Nadav and Avihu drew their inspiration from the wellsprings of binah. They sought the sublime experiences that characterize this realm, a spiritual grandeur that is accessible in our world. Due to their heightened awareness of their own greatness, however, they mistakenly saw in the holy realm of binah the ultimate source of reality. They placed all of their aspirations in this spiritual realm.

By doing so, they abandoned the higher source of light that transcends all spiritual freedom and joy. The true basis of life is rooted in the supernal realm of chochmah and Torah. Unpunished, their mistake would have brought about the collapse of the world's moral foundations. History is testimony to movements dedicated to great ideals that, because they were not anchored to the elevated source of chochmah, descended into the darkest depths of ignorance and cruelty.¹

Nadav and Avihu erred by pursuing the spiritual joys of prophecy and inspiration in a form detached from Torah and its practical teachings. This is what the Kabbalists meant by saying that Nadav and Avihu divided binah from chochmah. They tried to attain closeness to the Holy on their own initiative, offering a fire "that God had not instructed them." The various explanations for their behavior suggested by the Sages - that they were inebriated, that their heads were uncovered (a sign that they lacked proper awe of Heaven), that they taught Torah in front of their teacher - all reflect the same basic flaw. Nadav and Avihu concentrated their efforts on their own spiritual attainments, without integrating the discipline of Torah. They were highly aware of their own spiritual greatness, but personal holiness must be negated before the higher light of Torah.

Repairing the Mistake of Nadav and Avihu

The Torah stresses that Nadav and Avihu had no children. Their service of God was not one that could be transmitted to future generations. And yet their independent spirit and idealism have an important place in the future Messianic Era:

“Remember the Torah of Moses My servant, which I enjoined him on Horev, laws and statutes for all of Israel. Behold, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before God’s great and terrible day. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.”

(Malachi 3:22-24)

Malachi envisioned a future reconciliation between fathers and children. His prophecy also mentions Elijah the prophet and the Torah of Moses. What is the connection between these different themes?

The pre-Messianic Era is a time characterized by a tragic rift between the younger generation, idealistic and independent in spirit, and the older generation, faithful to the old traditions and the Torah of Moses. This divide parallels the sin of Nadav and Avihu, who separated binah from chochmah, dividing the ideals from their eternal source.

But the unique personality of Elijah, combining the prophetic ideals of justice with zeal for God’s covenant and Torah, will repair this rift. It is Elijah’s synthesis of Torah and idealism that will reconcile the generations. And together, the passionate spirit of youth (binah), together with the orderly and practical wisdom of the elders (chochmah), will bring about the final redemption.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from *Orot HaKodesh*, vol. II, pp. 283-286; vol. III, pp. 360-361)

See also: Shemini: The Priestly Benediction

1 How many millions have perished in wars over religious beliefs, as well as political ideologies such as communism and fascism?

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OU Torah

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

And Aaron Was Silent

He was an old man, and in many ways came from a very different world than I. And yet he taught me more than anyone else ever did. One of the things he taught me was that no one suffers as much as a parent who loses a child.

He delivered this lesson to me on a wintry day more than fifty years ago. He was my grandfather, my father’s father, and the family had just broken the news to him that his youngest grandchild, my baby cousin, had died. It was a sudden death, totally unexpected, and everyone was distraught. Grandpa too took the news very hard.

He then did something which surprised everyone present. He rose to leave the room, beckoning to me—his oldest grandchild, then fourteen—to accompany him. We both entered a small adjoining room in which there were a few sacred books, including a siddur. He opened the siddur, read from it for several moments, and then looked up to me, and tearfully whispered:

“There is nothing worse in the world than the death of one’s own child. A parent never recovers from such a blow. May the merciful God protect us all from such a fate.”

I will never forget those words. I remember them verbatim even today. And a lifetime of experience in the vocation of counseling has confirmed the truth of these words over and over again.

In this week’s Torah portion, Parshat Shemini, we read of just such a tragedy. On a bright and sunny spring day, somewhere in the Sinai wilderness, the Tabernacle is being inaugurated. It is an awesome spiritual experience in which “a divine fire descends from on high, in which all the people sing in unison, and fall upon their faces.”

It is the moment of a peak experience, for all the people, but especially for Aaron, the High Priest.

At that very moment, his two elder sons, Nadav and Avihu, step forward and commit a sacrilegious act which dispels the mood, and ruins the entire experience. Commentators differ widely as to exactly what was the sin of these two sons of Aaron. Scripture just says that “they offered God a strange fire, something He did not command of them.”

God’s wrath was expressed instantly. “A fire descended from before Him and consumed them, and they died in the presence of God.”

A parent, a father, lost a child. Not just one, but two. Not through a long and debilitating illness but suddenly, unexpectedly. And not in any ordinary set of circumstances, but in the context of an act of sacred worship.

What is Aaron’s reaction? Does he moan and groan and rend his clothing? Does he scream out in grief? Or does he vent his anger against the God who took his boys from him?

None of the above. “Vayidom Aharon.” Aaron is silent. The silence of shock? Perhaps. The silence of acceptance of fate? Perhaps. Or, perhaps, the silence which results when the range and depth of one’s emotions are too overwhelming to express in words. But silence.

If the sage words that my grandfather shared with me in my early adolescence are true, and I have every reason to believe that they are, Aaron remained silent about his grief for the rest of his life. Had he used the words of his ancestor Jacob, he could have said “I will go down to the grave in my agony.”

Soon after this episode in which my grandfather shared his wisdom with me I had the occasion to read a book which taught me a bit more about a grieving parent. It is quite possible that it was at precisely during the winter of my cousin’s death that I was assigned the book *Death Be Not Proud* by John Gunther in my English Literature class.

I somehow doubt that this book is still on the required reading lists of many tenth-graders today. But if it is not on those lists I certainly recommend that it be read, and particularly by teenagers who are learning their first lessons about life and its tragic disappointments.

In the book, the author describes his own son, who was taken from him by a vicious disease. He describes his son positively, but realistically. And he rages against the disease, and in some way, the Divine being who took his son from him. He insists to Death itself that it be not proud about its victory over its victim, his dear child.

It has been decades since I have read Gunther’s book, and it could very well be that I do not remember it with complete accuracy. But I do recall the poignancy and the power with which the author conveyed the full range of his painful emotions. And I will never forget those passages in which he insists that he will never recover from his loss that the wounds of a parent’s grief for his child can never heal.

Many are the lessons which students of Bible and Talmud have derived from the sad narrative contained in this week’s Torah portion. But there is at least one lesson which every empathic reader will surely learn as he or she attends to the opening verses of Leviticus 10.

It is the lesson contained in the mystery of Aaron’s reaction when his sons are consumed by a heavenly fire. For within the deafening silence of “Vayidom Aharon” are the depths of the terror which every parent dreads, and some parents have suffered. The dread of bereavement, of the loss of one’s child.

As always, in contemplating darkness, light stands out in contrast. Reflection upon death leads to an appreciation of life. The story of the death of Aaron’s children should, if nothing else, enable us to appreciate all the more those of our children who are alive and well.

As we embark upon this new pre-Passover spring season, with all the springtime symbols in the way of life and renewal, let us celebrate and appreciate all of our own offspring, may they live and be well.

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**Drasha - Shemini
White Noise**

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya & Henya Chana Raizel bas Rochel Bayla.

It was the last day of the Mishkan's inauguration. The joy was immeasurable, somewhat akin to the ribbon-cutting ceremony of a cherished king's new palace — in this case, a shrine to the glory of the King of kings and to the splendor of His reign. But in a tragic anticlimactic sequence, the celebration went terribly wrong. The children of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, entered into the realm of the outer limits, the Holy of Holies, the Kodesh HaKedoshim. They offered incense, something they assumed would surely bring joy to their Creator. But it was their own recipe.

Uncommanded, and uncalled for, something went terribly wrong. "A fire came forth from before Hashem and consumed them, and they died before Hashem" (Leviticus 10:1-2). It's hard for us, here, to fathom the pain. Remember that picture of a smiling schoolteacher and her fellow astronauts, waving in anticipation of another successful mission on America's galactic pride and joy, only to be vaporized into a mist of memories plunging toward the ocean in a disastrous fate? The beloved children of a beloved leader on a beloved day in a beloved service were gone in an instant, from glory to death. Yet their own father did not react in open agony, rather only through silence and acceptance. "And Aaron was silent" (ibid v. 3). That silence was not only commended, but extolled. As a reward for that stoic reaction of acceptance, the next command in the Torah is offered directly to Aharon without Moshe, who normally was the principal in receiving Heavenly directives.

Yet despite the praise meted to Aharon for his silence, the nation is commanded to react in a diametrically opposed manner. Moshe commands the nation, "the entire House of Israel shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited" (Leviticus 10:6). Aharon is praised for his silence, yet the nation is told to openly bewail the tragedy. What is the difference?

Back in the 1800's, the Magid of Trisk and Reb Mendel of Vorke were dear friends living next to each other. But, unfortunately Rav Mendel had to move to the other side of the forest, a distance of a half-a-day's walk. Seeing his agony, Reb Mendel's sexton, Moishele, anxiously offered to make the three-hour trip each Friday to deliver correspondence.

And so it went. Every Friday morning, Moishele would set out across the forest and deliver Reb Mendel's letter to the Trisker Magid. He would wait for the Magid to read the letter and reply. Often it would take a while until the Magid returned from his study, eyes red from tears, his quivering hand holding the magnificently crafted response in a special envelope. Moishele would deliver the response to the Vorke Rebbe, and that letter, too, evoked the same emotional response: tears of joy and meaning filled the Rebbe's eyes.

After a year as a faithful envoy, Moishele's curiosity overtook him. "What possibly can those letters contain? Would it be so bad if I took a peek?" Therefore, one Friday he carefully opened the envelope — without disturbing the seal. He saw absolutely nothing. Just a blank paper rested between the walls of the envelope.

Shocked, Moshe carefully, placed the so-called letter back into the envelope and delivered it to the Trisker Maggid. Like clockwork, the Rebbe went into the study, and a half-hour later, bleary-eyed and shaken, he returned a letter to be delivered to his friend Reb Mendel of Vorke.

At this point, Moishele could not wait to leave the house and race back into the forest, where he would secretly bare the contents of the envelope, hoping to solve the mysterious exchange.

Again, blank paper. Moishele was mortified. "Have I been schlepping six hours each week with blank papers? What is this a game?" he wondered.

The entire Shabbos he could not contain his displeasure. Motzoai Shabbos, Reb Mendel called him in to his study. "You seem agitated, my dear shammass," he asked. "What seems to be the problem?"

"Problem?" he responded. "You know those letters I've been carrying. I admit it. I looked, this Friday. There was nothing in them! They were blank! What kind of game is this?"

Reb Mendel, did not flinch. "The Torah," he said, "has black letters on white parchment. The black contain the words we express. The white contains a message that is deeper than letters. Our feelings are often expressed through black letters. This week, we wrote with the white parchment. We expressed an emotion that transcends letters." It is very important to realize one cannot equate the reaction required by a mourner to that of the responsive community. Not everyone is on the level to keep quiet. For those

who can make their statement of faith and strength through silence, that is an amazing expression. For the rest of us, who are not on that level, we must express our sorrow and exclaim it in a human way as afforded by the dictates of Moshe.

Refuah Shlaima to Yehuda Boruch ben Sora Menucha

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Shemini

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya & Henya Chana Raizel bas Rochel Bayla.

How Is Being the Kohen Gadol for Seven Days a Punishment?

The first pasuk in this week's parsha says, "It was on the eighth day, Moshe called to Aharon and his sons and to the elders of Israel" [Vayikra 9:1]. The Baal HaTurim writes that the Gematria of the (third, fourth and fifth) words (of this pasuk) "...haShemini Karah Moshe..." (the eighth Moshe called) equals the Gematria of the words "Haya bYom Rosh Chodesh Nissan" (which means "was on the day of the New Month of Nissan").

The eighth day followed seven preparatory days of inauguration of the Mishkan [Tabernacle], which took place during the last days of the month of Adar. Now who acted as the "Kohen" for the entire inauguration process of the Mishkan? Chazal say it was Moshe Rabbeinu. Chazal say that Moshe commented, "Since I argued with the Almighty by the Burning Bush for seven days about whether I should be the one to lead Klal Yisrael out of Egypt, I only merited serving as the Kohen Gadol for seven days. After this period, I lost the job to my brother Aharon and his descendants.

In the beginning of Parshas Shemos, the Ribono shel Olam came to Moshe and said, "Take the Jews out of Egypt" and Moshe said, "No!" It is clear from the pesukim that this argument went back and forth for quite some time. Chazal say that it went on for seven days. Now Moshe recognized in hindsight, "Because I then refused for seven days, therefore I only had the privilege of acting as the High Priest for seven days." This is the language of the Medrash. This, in fact, is also a Gemara in Tractate Zevachim [102a]. The "original plan," so to speak, was that Moshe's brother Aharon was supposed to be the "Levi" and Moshe Rabbeinu was supposed to be the "Kohen". In that Gemara, Rav Yehoshua ben Korcha states that normally, whenever the Torah uses the term "Charon Af" in connection with the Almighty (indicating His Anger), there are consequences. And yet, even though the Torah uses that term in connection with Moshe's persistent refusal to accept his mission [Shemos 4:14], Moshe does not appear to suffer consequences for this inappropriate behavior.

Rav Shimon ben Yochai responds that here too there were consequences, as it is written (in that very pasuk), "Behold Aharon, your brother, the Levi..." indicating that originally Aharon was supposed to be only the Levi, but now, because of your refusal to immediately accept your mission, Aharon will be the Kohen, the job that was supposed to be yours. "From now on you will be the Levi and he will be the Kohen."

Moshe Rabbeinu lost the Priesthood for himself and his sons after him, because it took seven days of arguments before he agreed to take the Jews out of Egypt. The Baal HaTurim says an incredible thing — because he refused for seven days, therefore he got to be Kohen for seven days! This seems very strange! It seems backwards. Is this a punishment or a reward? It seems counterintuitive. Would we say that had he refused his mission for only one day he would be the Kohen for one day? The longer he refused the

longer he is Kohen? This does not make sense! Being the Kohen (even) for seven days seems more like a reward than a punishment!

A number of years ago, we mentioned an answer to this question from Rav Simcha Zissel, the Chevroner Rosh Yeshiva. He said that in truth, it is a punishment. However, why did Moshe refuse the mission? He refused for very good and noble reasons – because of his extreme modesty. He felt that he was not worthy enough to accept the position. His humility convinced him that the job should go to his older brother, Aharon. Now, although Moshe refused because of a very appropriate character trait, the Almighty weighs out the actions of the righteous like the width of a thread. He gives them their just rewards and just punishments down to the finest nuance of their actions.

The punishment was that Moshe lost the Priesthood on a permanent basis. However, Moshe was deserving of reward for the noble reason for which he was refusing to lead Klal Yisrael, for his sensitivity and nobility of character. Therefore, the reward was that at least for seven days he would be the Kohen Gadol.

I recently heard another answer to this question on a tape from Rabbi Isaac Bernstein, of blessed memory, who was a Rav in England. He cited a very interesting Medrash Shmuel on Maseches Avos. The Mishna in Avos [4:21] teaches that jealousy, lustfulness, and honor-seeking takes a person out of the world. A person can become obsessed with any of these vices to such an extent that he does crazy things that will cost him his Olam HaBah (the World-to-Come).

The Medrash Shmuel asks, if this is the correct interpretation, the Mishna should be worded differently. It should say, “One who is jealous, lustful, or has desire for honor has no portion in the World-to-Come. The Mishna actually reads “Jealously, lustfulness, and honor-seeking take a person out of the world.” It seems from the language of the Mishna that such a person has entered Olam HaBah and then he is extracted from it!

The Medrash Shmuel therefore offers a very novel interpretation: The punishment of a person who has jealousy, lustfulness, or desire for honor in fact involves the loss of his portion of Olam HaBah. However, the punishment is administered by first placing him in Olam HaBah, giving him a brief opportunity to experience it and see what he will be missing, and then taking him out from there!

Someone who loses Olam HaBah without ever having tasted it does not really suffer that much. He does not know what he is missing. However, if he is placed in Olam HaBah for a short time, so he has a chance to luxuriate in the unimaginable pleasure of that experience and then is removed from there, he will feel the magnitude of the punishment.

Rabbi Bernstein suggests that this is the way to reconcile the fact that Moshe was given the opportunity to serve for a week as Kohen Gadol with the Talmudic teaching that he suffered the consequence of “Vayichar Af Hashem” for having initially persisted in his refusal to accept G-d’s Divine mission by losing the Kehunah. If someone loses the Kehunah without ever having experienced it, he does not feel the loss. If someone loses it after having enjoyed its privilege, then it is a big punishment!

I said over this thought recently to someone confined to a wheel chair. We were discussing this Rashi and the Baal HaTurim. I told him this vort from Rav Isaac Bernstein. He told me that he has a friend who has spina bifida. Since shortly after infancy, this friend has been confined to a wheelchair. His friend told him an amazing thing: “If I ever had to come back to this world again as a different Gilgul (via soul transmigration), I would want to come back again with spina bifida. Why? It is because in this condition I go to Camp Simcha, I have such wonderful friends, and people treat me so beautifully. I am happy the way I am. In fact, this life has been so pleasant and so geshmak that if I had to come back again, this is exactly the way I would like to have it.” That was his attitude.

The person with whom I was discussing the above idea had not always been confined to a wheelchair. He had once been able to walk and was once a fully functional individual. Now, Rachmana litzlan [May the All Merciful

Spare Us (from such suffering)], his illness confines him to a wheelchair. He told me, “I would never say what my friend who has spina bifida said. I know what it is to be able to walk, and I know what it is to be able to be independent. I know what I am missing. For my friend, ignorance is bliss, but I know what it is like, and if I had to do it over, I certainly would not request that this happen to me again.

That was his reaction to this Chazal. Hashem told Moshe, “You see what it is to be a Kohen? That — you cannot have!” We do not appreciate what we have until we have it and lose it. However, if we never had it, there is less of an appreciation of what we do not have.

Hoisted with Their Own Petard

The Torah teaches: “He said to Ahraon: ‘Take yourself a calf, a young male of cattle, for a sin offering and a ram for an olah offering, unblemished. And to the Children of Israel speak as follows: Take a he-goat for a sin offering and a calf and a sheep in their first year – unblemished – for an olah offering.” [Vayikra 9:2-3]. Both Aharon and the Children of Israel had to bring sin offerings as atonements.

The Meshech Chochma quotes a Toras Kohanim: Why was it necessary for the Children of Israel to bring more than Aharon? (They brought both a calf and a goat and he only brought a calf.) It is because they needed to achieve atonement for both what they did previously and what they did most recently. Their original sin was, “They took Yosef’s coat and slaughtered a goat...” [Bereshis 37:31]. They still had the sale of Yosef hanging over their heads. In addition, a more recent sin was hanging over their heads, as the Torah says, “...they made for themselves a molten calf and they bowed down to it and slaughtered to it...” [Shemos 32:8]. Therefore, they now needed a goat to atone for the incident involving the goat and they needed to bring a calf to atone for the incident involving a calf.

Rav Meir Simcha (the author of the Meshech Chochmah) asks: Why now? The sale of Yosef happened years earlier. Rav Meir Simcha answers that up until now, there may have been a mitigating factor in their actions relating to the sale of Yosef. They felt they might have been somewhat justified. Yosef should not have related evil stories about them to their father. If he had a complaint about their behavior, he should have brought it straight to them. “If he thought we were not treating the sons of the handmaidens appropriately, he should have chastised us directly. Why does he run to our father right away? We are adults; we deserve the courtesy of his direct complaint.” That was their original claim to defend themselves: Yosef was not acting like a mensch!

However, now (after the sin of the Golden Calf) where Chur did in fact come to them with a complaint (that they should not be making an idol to replace Moshe – it would be Avodah Zarah!) and they killed him, their original claim of justification was proven to be worthless. We see now what your reaction is with somebody who comes and tries to give you mussar to your face. Do not tell me that Yosef should have done that instead of going to Yaakov with the report of your misbehavior

This is why now they not only had to bring a calf to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf but they also had to bring a goat to atone for the sin of the sale of Yosef. Retroactively, they indicted themselves.

We see the same phenomenon from a Gemara in Yoma [22b]: “At the moment that the Holy One Blessed Be He said to Shaul ‘Go smite Amalek.’ (Hashem commanded Shaul to wipe out Amalek – men, women, and children, even the animals) Shaul said (to himself), ‘If when one person dies, the Torah requires us to bring a calf to decapitate (as atonement), certainly it is not appropriate to kill out all these souls of Amalek. Also, if man has sinned, what sin did the animals do?’” So Shaul said, “I cannot kill out Amalek, it is too cruel.”

The Gemara continues that a Heavenly Voice (Bas Kol) came out and said, “Do not be so righteous.” In addition, later when Shaul gave orders to Doeg “You go out and smite the Kohanim (of Nov),” another Heavenly Voice came out and said “Do not be so wicked.” (Their terrible ‘crime’ was that

they provided food and shelter for Dovid and his soldiers.) So what happened to Shaul's great compassion at Nov? The answer is that when compassion suited him, he invoked it and when compassion did not suit him, he was not at all compassionate.

There is an expression in English [from Shakespeare's Hamlet] "hoisted with his own petard" (a "petard" is a small explosive device). The phrase's meaning is literally that the bomb-maker is blown up ("hoisted" off the ground) by his own bomb. It indicates an ironic reversal or poetic justice. That is exactly what we see here: "If I would have received mussar, I would have listened..." No, way! Look what happened when you did receive mussar, just look how you acted! "Oh I am too compassionate, I cannot kill them. How did the animals sin?" No way! Look what happened to Nov the City of Kohanim!

The Meshech Chochma teaches us that a person's own activities can come back to haunt him. They can come back to indict him. That is why specifically now the Children of Israel needed to bring atonement for the sin of the Sale of Yosef. Retroactively, we see that their claimed excuse is without merit. They were hoisted with their own petard.

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Shemini

פרשת שמני תשעט

ויקריבו לפני ד' אש זרה אשר לא צוה אתם... וידם אהרן

And they brought before Hashem an alien fire that He had not commanded them... And Aharon was silent. (10:1,3)

Much has been written concerning the apparent misstep of Nadav and Avihu in offering what was considered an alien fire, and the reaction of their father, Aharon *HaKohen*, to their tragic deaths. *Chazal* have analyzed and explained every word in order to give later generations a clue, a path for understanding and coming to grips with this tragedy. The Torah writes, *Asher lo tzivah osam*, "That He (Hashem) had not commanded them." Apparently, their sin was in acting on their own. Discipline is obviously important, but is it that demanding? The *Chiddushei HaRim* sheds light on this "sin." He derives from the words *Asher lo tzivah lahem* that man's claim to greatness is only to the extent to which he fulfills Hashem's commands.

Nadav and Avihu were *tzaddikim gemurim*, completely righteous men, whose intent was certainly *l'shem Shomayim*, for the glory of Heaven. Yet, there was one thing missing from their act of devotion: *tzivui Hashem*. *Asher lo tzivah osam*: Although they had not been commanded to act, they did so. From their punishment, explains the *Chiddushei HaRim*, we derive an important lesson: carrying out Hashem's command is what makes an action important – not its intrinsic value. *Yiddishkeit* is a religion built upon *dvar Hashem*, the word/command of G-d. When one severs the act from the command, the *mitzvah* becomes lifeless.

When Aharon *HaKohen* remained silent following the deaths of his sons, it was not merely to suppress his actual emotions. Indeed, this silence bespoke his true greatness. Aharon had the ability to abrogate himself completely – body and soul – to Hashem's Will. Hashem selected him to be the *Kohen Gadol*, explains the *Sfas Emes*, because of his sole desire to fulfill the Will of Hashem, Who commanded him. *Vayidom Aharon* was his affirmation of Hashem's Will, his acceptance of Hashem's judgment. *Bikerovai Ekadesh*, "Through those closest to Me, I will be sanctified." Regardless of one's spiritual eminence, in order to achieve closeness to Hashem he must carry out His Will. Aharon's suppression of emotion was, in effect, atonement for his sons' overzealousness to serve. The ultimate

service to Hashem is to perform His Will. This is one instance when "extra credit" can detract from the actual achievement.

יתבצא אש מלפני ד' ותאכל אותם וימתו לפני ד'

A fire came forth from before Hashem and consumed them and they died before Hashem. (10:2)

Chazal enumerate a number of areas of deficiency in the behavior of Nadav and Avihu which, on their lofty level, was considered sinful. One of their shortcomings was manifest in their drinking wine prior to performing the service. Inebriation might find an acceptable place in contemporary society's morally bankrupt value system, but it certainly did not belong in the Priestly service. While Nadav and Avihu certainly did not entertain the idea of inebriation, this does not preclude their partaking in a glass of wine. Truth be told, they were not commanded against drinking wine prior to performing the service until after the fact – and then they were gone. It was their brothers who were the beneficiaries of this law. How could it be held against them? This question is posed by the *Rosh (Teshuvos, 20)*. He explains that they should have learned a lesson from precedent, having seen examples of individuals (Noach, Lot) who, upon being lax with alcohol, had erred. Likewise, Nadav and Avihu should have realized that wine causes one to err. Indeed, it is quite possible that their error in the service occurred as a result of the wine.

People should take a lesson from the past. Lot drank; consequently, he lost control of his faculties and acted licentiously. Noach did not fare well when he had too much wine. One does not have to be extraordinarily brilliant to realize that wine can be dangerous.

Veritably, Noach did not have from whom to learn about the ills of inebriation – but Lot did. Furthermore, Lot should have learned from his first night's travesty with his daughter. Why did he repeat his error? (Truthfully, Noach could have learned from Adam *HaRishon*, who some commentators contend ate from a grape.) Not only should one learn from the past mistakes of others, he should also learn from his own past mistakes.

Some of life's most meaningful and compelling lessons are derived from those who have lived before us, whose experiences were similar to what we are going through today. If we listen and respond to their advice, they might even guide us toward choices that are beneficial to us. Surely, they can steer us away from making flawed decisions based upon reckless indifference to what others have to say. These mistakes can not only hinder our success, they can destroy us. Furthermore, on a positive note, when we look to grandparents, parents, mentors and friends who have "been there and done that," we find examples of faith, commitment, hard work, dedication and sacrifice – qualities that guide us towards the path of success.

Judaism is a rendezvous between the past and the future. We are enjoined a number of times in the Torah to *z'chor*, remember, various experiences that have molded our nationhood. *Zikaron* means memory, which is the inactive form of *z'chor*. By constantly fulfilling the commandment to remember actively, we see to it that the past is not relegated to a distant history; it does not become an inactive memory, but it is incorporated into the present. If our future is to become a reality, we must see to it that it is firmly anchored in the bedrock of the past. Life moves on. We must move on with time and learn to acclimate ourselves with the benefits and challenges of the present, so that we can hope and plan for the future. Someone who lives only in the past lives a life filled with nothingness. The past is gone. It remains a source of direction for the future, with lessons garnered from the past. Unless we look backwards, we have great difficulty properly focusing on going forwards.

The secular movements which began to germinate in Germany and Russia at the end of the eighteenth century, and then metastasized to America in the mid-nineteenth century, saw the past as a hindrance to realizing their idea of the future. Thus, the adherents broke ties with the past. Without history there is no stability, no anchor, no pride. One cannot look forward to anything if he has nothing on which to look back, but (in their alienated minds) shame.

The adherents of the secular movements were ashamed of the persecution, of the pogroms, of the fact that the Jews were considered parasites. It troubled them. Rather than accept that Hashem providentially guided their lives and that everything occurred for a reason, they chose to ignore both Hashem and the reason. Why should one own up to his obligations to the Heavenly messages that he receives if he can just as easily sever his connection and be oblivious to them?

Thus, they broke with the past. They lived for the present. Sadly, they neither have a substantial present, nor do they harbor much hope for the future. All because they broke with the past.

בקרבי אקדש

Through those who are close to Me, I will be sanctified. (10:3)

When Hashem carries out His decree of Strict Justice, especially when – as a result of this decree – someone dies, Hashem’s Name is sanctified. There is no greater *Kiddush*, sanctification, of Hashem’s Name, than *missah*, death. It indicates that Hashem is in control, that He alone determines how long and under what circumstances one will live. The *Talmud* (*Niddah* 30b) comments concerning the *pasuk*, *Ki li tichra kol berech*, “To me will every knee bend” (*Yeshayahu* 45), *Zeh ha’missah*, “This is a reference to death.”

Indeed, the solemnity of a funeral – even one that takes place with a majority of non-practicing Jews in attendance - is compelling. Everyone dons a *yarmulke*, recites *Kaddish* and attempts to observe the various *halachos* intrinsic to the mourning ritual. This is because death evokes the spiritual dimension within a person and calls to mind the awesome power of death/mortality. It demonstrates to us that everything and everyone is nullified before G-d.

With the understanding that *Kiddush*, sanctity, means understanding that Hashem’s Presence and power fill the world, that He controls every aspect of Creation, we understand the meaning of *chillul Hashem*. *Chillul* (derived from the word *chatal*, hole, vacuum) is a statement that the sinner makes (by inference through his actions) that Hashem does not, in fact, fill the entire world. When a person commits a *chillul Hashem* he makes a statement: “G-d does not fill this place. I can do what I want.” With this in mind, *Horav Shimshon Pincus*, *zl*, explains why the only *kapparah*, atonement, for *chillul Hashem*, is death. When a person desecrates Hashem’s Name, he creates a void in the glory of Heaven, a void that can be filled only through a *Kiddush Hashem* of the same caliber of the void. This is death.

This is a frightening statement. The very idea that *chillul Hashem* can be repaired only through death is in and of itself alarming. The “why,” the statement inferred from his actions that G-d does not exist here is dreadful. We do not take *chillul Hashem* seriously. Otherwise, we would exert the greatest care in our public activity to make absolutely certain that a bystander who does not know any better does not suspect us of a misstep. The consequences can be devastating.

ואיכם כל בית ישראל יבכו את השרפה אשר שרף ד'

And your brethren, the entire House of Yisrael, shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited. (10:6)

Chazal derive from here that the suffering of a Torah scholar (in this case, Aharon *HaKohen* and his remaining sons grieving) should be shared by all of *Klal Yisrael*. Indeed, as *Horav Shlomo Kluger*, *zl*, says, all Jews should show solidarity by mourning and grieving over a fellow Jew’s misfortune. *Kol Bais Yisrael* applies to every generation of Jews. Forever, until *Moshiach* arrives and wipes away our tears, it is incumbent upon us to shed tears over the tragic and untimely deaths of the two sons of Aharon *HaKohen*, Nadav and Avihu. Indeed, in the *Yom Kippur Machzor* right before *Krias HaTorah*, it is stated that it is a noble merit to weep over the deaths of Nadav and Avihu. [The Torah reading of *Yom Kippur* is from *Parashas Acharei Mos*, which mentions their deaths.]

This imperative (to mourn Nadav and Avihu) is not consistent with an inference made by *Chazal* (*Moed Kattan* 27b) from a *pasuk* in *Yirmiyahu*

22:10, *Al tivku lameis v'al tanudu lo*, “Do not cry for a deceased and do not shake your head for him.” We should not mourn/grieve for the departed more than necessary. During the first three days (following the death of a relative), the family grieves/weeps. Seven days are allotted for eulogy and lamenting, i.e., intellectual appreciation of the deceased; thirty days are set aside for prohibiting haircuts. After that (thirty days after passing), Hashem says to the mourners, “You do not have greater compassion than I.” In other words, after thirty days we move on. How do we reconcile *Chazal*’s allotment of a thirty day limit on mourning with the injunction to mourn Nadav and Avihu forever?

Horav Shimshon Pincus, *zl*, explains the concept of “moving on” as related to the *seudas ha’vraah*, the meal eaten by the mourners following the funeral. The foods that are consumed are round, i.e. eggs, beans, bagels, which express the concept of the life cycle. This illustration that the world was created upon the principle of *v'zarach ha'shemesh, u'ba ha'shemesh; dor holeich v'dor ba*, “The sun rises and the sun sets; a generation leaves (dies), and a generation comes (is born).” The ensuing generation completes/fills the vacuum left by the previous generation. Thus, mourning and expressing grief has limits, because we must keep in mind that what has departed has been (sort of) replaced. We must move on.

This applies only when the passing of the deceased has been a natural phenomenon. In a situation in which the passing represents an uprooting, however, a removal of sorts in which the original nature and character of the deceased and what he/she represented is gone forever, the lament and grief do not end. One who loses a limb mourns its loss for the remainder of his mortal life. Some “endings” are final and overwhelming, leaving no room for replacement.

The sudden, untimely deaths of Nadav and Avihu, under such tragic circumstances, went far beyond the pale of acceptability. Had they died after living long lives, after having mentored successors who would replace them in accordance with the level of the upcoming generation, then the mourning and grieving expressed over their loss would be “normal,” within the parameters of the loss of a *gadol*, Torah giant. They, however, neither died naturally under normal circumstances, nor did they leave anyone in line to step into their shoes. Our nation will forever be bereft of the two Torah and spiritual giants of the caliber of Nadav and Avihu. Thus, the weeping continues throughout the generations.

This, posits *Rav Pincus*, is the underlying reason for the weeping that continues for the myriads of Jewish souls that were prematurely – and under the most brutal circumstances – taken during the *Churban* of the *Batei Mikdash*, when the Temples were destroyed. Gone was a world that never returned; gone was a generation that left a void which is felt throughout the millennia. This is an incalculable, irreplaceable loss. Thus, we continue to weep on the Tenth of *Teves*, Seventeenth of *Tammuz* and on *Tishah B'Av*. These destructions were followed by the Crusades, Inquisition, Pogroms of *Tach v'Tat*, the many wanton murders that devastated our people in Western and Eastern Europe for hundreds of years, until the cataclysmic Holocaust which saw the cruel murder of six million of our brothers and sisters. For them we continue to weep – and weep.

Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum in *Eretz Yisrael*, is a unique memorial to the martyrs of the Holocaust. A little over thirty years ago, with funds donated by a family in California, they added a wing dedicated to the memory of the one and a half million children under the age of twelve who were sadistically slaughtered by the Nazi murderers. Among the victims was the donor’s (*Spiegel* family) son.

Rabbi Berel Wein describes his experience visiting this poignant memorial. He walked into a single enormous underground room, which was pitch black, so dark that he was unable to see his hand in front of his face. In the middle of the room, a single burning candle provided a small dot of light which was bounced off mirrors placed strategically throughout the room. One candle multiplied many times over to give the impression that there were candles burning all over. Indeed, wherever one looked, an eerie

reflection of candlelight greeted him. As Rabbi Wein remarked, “It was a congregation of tiny souls in search of bodies.”

The darkness was overwhelming – but so was the bouncing light. Adding to the frightening spectral effect was the sound of a recorded (man’s) voice reading off names of young children, their ages and the cities from which they were taken captive to be murdered. He stood in the blackest of rooms, staring at the ghastly light and imagining that he was surrounded by one and a half million children whose names he was hearing. These children would have now (late 1980’s) been in their forties and fifties, with children and grandchildren of their own. Instead, their lives were cruelly snuffed out.

Understandably, this scene was compelling, to the point that Rabbi Wein remembers breaking into incessant weeping and running from the building into the blinding Yerushalayim sunlight. Then he stopped – and thought for a moment. It had just occurred to him that his name had not been called. The age was a good fit; so was the name. The difference was that he “happened” to live in Chicago during the Holocaust – not Europe. Had his grandfather moved east instead of west, his name quite possibly could have been on the list of *Kedoshim*, martyrs.

Those of us who survived – either by being in the right place at the wrong time, or, like myself, being a child of survivors who by *Hashgachah Pratis*, Divine Providence, was born after the war to parents who survived the *Gehinom* – have an awesome, unbelievable prodigious obligation, a responsibility to do whatever we possibly can to elevate *Kavod Shomayim*. We were spared for a reason. Those one and a half million souls whose lives were cut short provide a reason for us to weep. Weeping is personal, an expression of our emotions over what we/our generation/*Klal Yisrael* have lost. We cry for ourselves. What do we do for them? As Rabbi Wein says: We increase our efforts to do something positive for our People: build more *yeshivos*; welcome more Jews into the fold; reach out to those boys and girls who we are about to lose; do not rest until we have added our brick to the future *Bais Hamikdash*. We should remember that we live not only for ourselves, but we must also live for them.

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ר' מרדכי בן ר' אפרים ז"ל נפטר ר"ח ניסן תשנ"ג
זכה לראות דורות עוסקים בתורה ויראת שמים
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**Project Genesis :: Weekly Halacha - Parshas Shemini
Mashkim Megulim: What Is It?
Rabbi Doniel Neustadt**

In ancient times, poisonous snakes and reptiles were commonly found even in populated areas. In keeping with the Torah’s strict exhortation to safeguard one’s life[1], the Rabbis issued an edict forbidding drinking from any uncovered vessel which had been left unsupervised, for fear that a poisonous snake might have ejected venom into its contents while drinking from it[2].

This prohibition, known as *mashkim megulim*, “uncovered beverages,” is recorded in the Talmud[3] and codified by the Rambam as *halachah* which we are to practice today. But the Shulchan Aruch, who starts by quoting the Rambam, concludes by ruling that this edict no longer applies[4]. Since poisonous snakes and reptiles are rarely found in populated areas nowadays, there is no longer any reason to forbid drinking an uncovered, unsupervised beverage. The basic *halachah* follows this opinion, and one is no longer required to concern himself with this prohibition[5].

There are, however, *poskim* who maintain that the original edict applies even in our days. Their opinion is based on the following arguments:

Although poisonous snakes and reptiles are no longer common in most places, they do exist in some remote areas. Since one can easily avoid drinking *mashkim megulim*, there is little justification to discount a Rabbinic edict which was enacted for our benefit and protection[6]. In addition, while it is true that we no longer fear being poisoned by a snake or other reptile, we are still concerned about the venom of other rodents which may be harmful, even if not fatal[7].

A Rabbinic prohibition cannot be repealed even when the stated rationale no longer applies. This is because the Rabbis did not necessarily divulge all of the reasons behind their pronouncements. Consequently, even if the given reason is no longer applicable, we are still bound by the prohibition[8].

As stated yesterday, the basic *halachah* does not follow this opinion, and uncovered drinks may be consumed. Nevertheless, there are many people who choose to observe these *halachos* strictly[9], and there are several sources who strongly recommend[10] avoiding *mashkim megulim*[11], especially in Eretz Yisrael[12]. The following rules, therefore, apply only to those who choose to keep the *halachos* associated with the Rabbinic prohibition of *mashkim megulim*:

Question: Which beverages[13] are included in this prohibition and which are not?

Discussion: The following beverages and liquids are included:

Honey — bee’s honey only. Date honey is not affected by this prohibition.

Milk — boiled or raw.

Water, soda, beer, tea, coffee — boiled or raw, processed or unprocessed, flavored or unflavored[14].

Wine — uncooked only; *yayin mevushal* is permitted[15]. Uncooked grape juice is questionable[16].

Fruit juices, vinegar and oil are excluded from this prohibition[17].

Question: Are *mashkim megulim* prohibited only if left uncovered overnight?

Discussion: No. A drink left uncovered and unsupervised even for a few moments, even during the daytime, is classified as *mashkim megulim*[18].

“Uncovered” means completely uncovered. If the beverage was loosely covered with a paper plate or napkin etc., that is sufficient[19]. If the beverage was left uncovered inside a closed refrigerator, it is permitted[20]. If the beverage was left on the stove in an uncovered pot which was boiling and emitting steam, it is permitted[21].

“Unsupervised” means that the beverage was left completely alone[22] for a few moments. If, however, there was a person who was fully awake — even a baby[23] — in the room[24], the prohibition of *mashkim megulim* does not apply[25]. This holds true even if the person in the room was not watching the beverage at all, and even if his eyes were closed the entire time and even if the room was dark[26].

Some *poskim* hold that *yotzei venichnas* supervision — i.e., a beverage left uncovered and unsupervised in a room where there is constant traffic — is considered sufficient supervision[27]. Others, however, hold that *yotzei venichnas* is not valid for *mashkim megulim*[28].

Even those who are generally lenient with *mashkim megulim* are careful not to use such wine for *Kiddush*[29] or for other ritual purposes which require wine, such as *Havdalah* and *Birkas ha-mazon*[30], since it is considered demeaning to use *mashkim megulim* for *mitzvos*. *L’chatchilah*, therefore, wine which was left uncovered and unsupervised for even a brief period — as little as twenty minutes[31] — should not be used for *mitzvos*. If, however, no other wine is available, one may use such wine as long as its taste and smell were not compromised in any way[32]. If the wine was left uncovered for five or six hours[33], and surely if it was left uncovered overnight, we are concerned that its taste or smell was affected and it may not be used for *Kiddush* etc., even *b’diavad*[34].

1. *Devarim* 4:9, 4:15, as explained in *Berachos* 32b. See *Beir ha-Gra*, C.M. 427:8. 2. Although this is a Rabbinic prohibition, some *poskim* maintain that once the Rabbis pointed out that *mashkim megulim* may be dangerous, drinking from them becomes forbidden *min ha-Torah*; see *Levush*, C.M. 427:11, *Tevuos Shor* 13:2 and *Chasam Sofer*, *Avodah Zarah* 30a. 3. *Avodah Zarah* 30a and *Chullin* 9b. The original source is the *Mishnah* (*Terumos* 8:4). 4. Y.D. 116:1, based on the view of *Tosafos*, *Rashba* and *Tur*. 5. *Mishnah Berurah* 160:23. 6. *Pri Chadash* and *Pri To’ar*, quoted by *Birkei Yosef* and *Aruch ha-Shulchan*, Y.D. 116:1. 7. *Talmidei Rabbeinu Yonah*, *Avodah Zarah*. See also *Levush*, Y.D. 116:1. 8. *The Vilna Gaon* (quoted in *Ma’asei Rav* 95 and in *Pe’as ha-Shulchan* 2:32). 9. *Mashkim megulim*, unlike non-kosher food, are not *bateil b’shishim* (*Chochmas Adam* 68:1; *Aruch ha-Shulchan* 116:10). 10. See *Pischei Teshuvah*, Y.D. 116:1, quoting *Shelah ha-Kadosh*, that while uncovered drinks are halachically permitted, it is advisable to refrain from drinking them. 11. In addition to the sources quoted above, see *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 33:5, who warns against drinking *mashkim megulim*. See also *Orchos Rabbeinu*, vol. 1, pgs. 206-209, quoting the *Chazon Ish* and the *Steipler’s* strict adherence to all of the laws of *mashkim megulim*, even to the extent of not using such water for washing the hands. 12. *Birkei Yosef*, Y.D. 116:3 and *Pe’as ha-Shulchan* 116:10. 13. See *Minchas Yitzchak* 9:85. 14. The Talmudic prohibition also included juicy fruits, e.g., watermelons and grapes, which were cut or split open and left unsupervised; see *Beitzah* 7b and *Rambam*, *Hilchos Rotzeiach* 11:8. However, nowadays, even those who are stringent with *mashkim megulim* do not mention unsupervised fruits as being prohibited, unless there is clear evidence that the fruit was tampered with. When in question, consult a *rav*. See *Kaf ha-Chayim*, Y.D. 116:9. 15. *Orchos Rabbeinu*, vol. 1, pg. 206; *Shemiras Nefesh* 11:28, quoting *Chazon Ish*. 16. *Rambam*, *Hilchos Rotzeiach* 11:8. There is, however, a debate among contemporary *poskim* whether or not *yayin mevushal* on the market today is cooked in such a way as to qualify as “*mevushal*.” See *The Weekly Halachah Discussion*, vol. 1, (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1997) on *Parashas Ki Sisa*, for an elaboration on this issue. 17. *Rambam*, *Hilchos Rotzeiach* 11:7. 18. *Rambam*, *Hilchos Rotzeiach* 11:11; *Aruch ha-Shulchan*, Y.D. 116:3. *Chazon Ish* is quoted as remarking that we do not know the exact time period which renders beverages as *mashkim megulim*. [In addition to the edict against *mashkim megulim*, there is an additional advisory against drinking beverages that were left uncovered and unsupervised overnight; see *Maseches Derech Eretz* 11 and *Tzava’as R’ Eliezer* *ha-Gadol*

62, quoted by Harav C. Kanievsky in *Shemiras Nefesh*.] 19. *Orchos Rabbeinu* vol. 1, pg. 208, quoting *Chazon Ish*. 20. *Kaf ha-Chayim* 272:9; Harav C. Kanievsky, quoting *Chazon Ish* (*Shemiras Nefesh* 11:84); *Shevet ha-Kehasi* 1:112. 21. Rambam, *Hilchos Rotzeiach* 11:8. 22. A closed-circuit camera is not considered supervision concerning *mashkim megulim*; Harav C. Kanievsky (*Shemiras Nefesh, Responsa* #11). 23. Based on *Midrash Rabbah, Noach* 34:12. 24. Or even in a nearby room from where he can see into the room where the beverage is; Harav C. Kanievsky (*Shemiras Nefesh, Responsa* #17). 25. *Perishah, Y.D.* 116:12. Some *poskim* rely on this type of supervision for all drinks except for wine; *Pri Chadash, Y.D.* 116, based on the view of the *Rif* and the *Rosh*. 26. Harav C. Kanievsky (*Shemiras Nefesh, Responsa* #77). 27. *Nefesh Adam* #6, based on *Yerushalmi, Terumos* 8:4, quoted by the *Meiri, Avodah Zarah* 30a. 28. *Pri Chadash, Y.D.* 116:1 This is also the view of *Chazon Ish* and the *Steipler* as quoted in *Orchos Rabbeinu*. See *Chelkas Binyamin* 116, *Tziyunim* 26. 29. *O.C.* 272:1. 30. *Birkei Yosef, O.C.* 272:1; *Beur Halachah* 272:1 (s.v. *al*); *Aruch ha-Shulchan* 272:5. 31. *Divrei Malkiel* 4:1. 32. *Mishnah Berurah* 272:3; *Kaf ha-Chayim* 272:7. See *Az Nidberu* 1:7. 33. *Divrei Malkiel* 4:1. 34. *Aruch ha-Shulchan* 272:5. See *Az Nidberu* 1:7.

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By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – And Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer, placed fire on it, and laid incense thereon, and offered strange fire which He had not commanded them. And there came forth fire from before God, and it devoured them, so that they died before God. (Leviticus 10:1–2)

The portion of Shemini begins with the great drama of the week-long consecration ceremony of the Sanctuary. The nation is exalted, the leadership is inspired – but suddenly joy is turned into tragedy when the two sons of Aaron the High Priest are consumed by a fire sent down by God. What caused such a hapless event? The biblical text seems to say that it was because “they offered a strange fire which [God] had not commanded.” What possible sin could these two “princes” in Israel have committed to make them worthy of such punishment?

The expression “strange fire” is so ambiguous that the various commentaries offer a number of possibilities. Immediately after the deaths of Aaron’s sons, the Torah issues a command forbidding Aaron and his sons to ever carry out their Sanctuary duties under the influence of any intoxicants. If a person cannot “...distinguish between the holy and the mundane, and between the unclean and the clean...” (Lev. 10:10) he doesn’t belong in the Ohel Moed (Tent of Meeting). Thus it’s not surprising that one midrash (*Vayikra Raba* 12:1) looks upon this injunction as a biblical hint that Nadav and Avihu were inebriated when they brought the incense offering, the intoxicant turning their incense offering into a “strange fire.”

Another midrash explains that Nadav and Avihu so envied Aaron and Moses, that they couldn’t wait for them to step down so that they could step up. This is the strange fire of jealousy which hadn’t been commanded of them; they themselves initiated a sacrifice without asking permission of their elders, Moses and Aaron. They were too ambitious for their own good.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, my rebbe and mentor, has often taught that in order to grasp how the sages wanted us to understand a given Torah portion, we should always turn to the haftora (the portion from the Prophets) for that week, which often serves as a commentary in and of itself.

Three separate events take place in the haftora of this portion, (chapters six and seven in *ii Samuel*): Thirty-thousand of the nation’s chosen join with King David on his journey to restore the previously conquered Holy Ark to Jerusalem, turning the occasion into a celebratory procession accompanied with all kinds of musical instruments. The ark is transported in an oxcart that belongs to the brothers, Uzzah and Ahio; when the oxen stumble, Uzzah reaches out to take hold of the ark. Right then and there, God strikes Uzzah dead.

Three months pass before David again attempts to bring back the ark, and when he arrives triumphant in the city of Zion, he dances with all of his might, upsetting his wife who chastises him: “How did the king of Israel get his honor today, who uncovered himself today in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows who shamelessly uncovers himself” (*ii Samuel* 6:21). The third incident records that David decides he wants to build a permanent dwelling for the ark of God rather than allowing it to rest in a curtained enclosure. At first the prophet Nathan is encouraging, but later in the night a voice tells him that although David’s throne will be established to last forever, he personally will not build the Temple; his son Solomon will. In the account of the same event recorded elsewhere, the blood that David caused to flow in the various wars he fought prevents him from building a Temple which must be dedicated to peace (*I Chronicles* 22:8).

All three incidents point to the same theme: the emotional instinct of the individual has to take a backseat to the emotional desire to come close, too close, to the holy; the holy must be revered from a distance.

Uzzah certainly did not intend disrespect when he took hold of the ark; nevertheless, touching the holiest object in existence without permission was forbidden. Since Michal is the daughter of King Saul, and knows first-hand that a king’s honor is not his own but is rather the nation’s, she cannot applaud David’s leaping and dancing in wild abandon – even if it be in religious ecstasy. As such, the monarch of Israel must always behave honorably and respectfully, fully in control of his actions.

And as to who will build the Holy Temple, King David himself must be ruled out because of all the spilled blood; his wars may have been necessary and even obligatory, but even the most just of wars brings in its wake excessive killing, often accidental killing of the innocent, emotional hatred and passionate zeal. What the haftora reflects back on is that performing a mitzvah for God which God didn’t command – no matter how inspired, spiritually or ecstatically – invites a disapproving, destructive blaze from heaven. Like Uzzah, Aaron’s sons got too close to the sacred, took the sacred into their own hands. Ecstasy, especially in the service of God, can turn into a sacrilegious act of zealotry, of passionate pursuit of God’s honor at the expense of human life and respect for others. Passionate religious fire in the name of God can turn into “self-righteous fanaticism” which can tragically lead to the desecration of the divine name, even to suicide bombers.

Nadav and Avihu are rare Jews, sons of Aaron, nephews of Moses, their lives dedicated to service in the Temple, privileged to be among the chosen few to have had a sapphire vision of God’s glory back at the sealing of the covenant in the portion of *Mishpatim*. We cannot even begin to comprehend their spiritual heights. Nevertheless, they die tragically because they brought a passionate fire not commanded by God. When people on the level of Nadav and Avihu fail to distinguish between Divine will and human will, allowing their subjective desires to take over, they are expressing their own emotions but are not necessarily doing the will of the Divine. Confusing our will with God’s will is truly playing with fire. If we limit ourselves to God’s commands in the ritual realm we can be reasonably certain that we are serving God and not our own egos and subjective hatreds and passions. One dare not get too close to the divine fire, lest one get burnt by that very fire.

Shabbat Shalom!

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Do We Really Want to be Tahor?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Tanner Training

“In my work, I tan animal hides. Should I train for a different *parnasah*, so that I can make a living after *Moshiach* comes?”

Question #2: Amorphous Amphibians

“What is the difference between a toad and a frog?”

Introduction:

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

Someone who becomes *tamei* may not enter the *Beis Hamikdash* or consume *terumah*, *ma’aser sheini*, *bikkurim* or *kodoshim*, foods that have sanctity. The following passage of this week’s *parshah* mentions eleven different categories of the laws of *tumah*, which I have numbered in the selection below to facilitate explaining them afterward. The Torah writes:

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

And the following creatures that creep on the ground (2) are *tamei* for you: The weasel,** the mouse, and the various species of toad. Also the hedgehog, the koach,*** the lizard, the snail and the mole. These are *tamei* to you among all the creeping animals – whoever touches them after they are dead will be *tamei* until evening. And anything that falls upon them after they are dead will become *tamei*, whether it is a wooden

vessel (3) or a garment (4) or leather (5) or sackcloth (6) – any vessel with which work is performed (7). It must be immersed in water, and then it remains tamei until evening, at which point it becomes tahor.

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

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

(1) Neveilah

When discussing someone who touched an animal carcass (neveilah), the Torah specifies that a person becomes tamei whether he touched it or carried it, but notes a halachic difference between the neveilah that was touched or was carried. Germane to carrying the carcass, which is called tumas masa, the Torah says that he must wash his clothes, but omits this detail when discussing someone who touches a carcass, which is called tumas maga. We see here a difference in halachah between the person who carries neveilah and one who touches it, without moving it. One who carries neveilah contaminates any utensils, food or beverage susceptible to tumah that he touches while he carries it. The clothes that he wears are used by the Torah as an example of any item that he touches while carrying or moving the neveilah. This tumah is called tumah be'chiburin, literally, tumah by connection. Any keilim, utensils or appliances, that now become tamei will require immersion in a mikveh or spring, and will become tahor again at the subsequent nightfall. (There is one type of utensil that is not affected by tumah be'chiburin -- earthenware vessels that were touched by a person while he carried a neveilah remain tahor. Also, tumah be'chiburin of neveilah does not contaminate people – therefore someone touching the person who is carrying the neveilah remains tahor.) However, someone who touches a neveilah without causing it to move does not contaminate something he touches at the same time. Whereas he himself becomes tamei and remains tamei, until he immerses in a mikveh or spring and then awaits nightfall afterwards, what he touches at the time remains tahor.

By the way, for those in chutz la'aretz, becoming tamei by moving or touching neveilah is not an uncommon situation. For example, someone who moves a package of packaged non-kosher meat in the supermarket has just carried neveilah and made himself and his clothes tamei (although, in all likelihood, they were already tamei).

Tanner training

At this point, let us examine one of our opening questions:

“In my work, I tan animal hides. Should I train for a different parnasah, so that I can make a living after Moshiach comes?”

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

(2) Sheretz

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

Yet, if our translation is correct, other small creatures, such as snakes, frogs, insects and other rodents are not included under the heading of tumas sheratzim. Although it may not seem very aesthetically pleasing to touch other dead insects, rodents or other small creatures, one does not become tamei when one touches them. One should wash one's hands because of sanitary reasons, but being sanitary and becoming tamei are dissimilar concepts.

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

Amorphous amphibians

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

A zoologist will note several differences between them, but this is a halachic article. According to Rashi (Vayikra 11:29), a toad is one of the eight sheratzim that are tamei, and a frog is not (see Rashi, Shemos 7:29 and also see Mishnayos Taharos 5:1,4 and Rash and Bartenura).

Laws of sheratzim

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

Toad vs. frog

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

This is a question that we can ask, but probably not answer, other than to accept the gezeiras hakasuv, the declaration of the Torah, and observe it as Hashem's will.

Although we endeavor to explain the reasons for mitzvot, we realize that we can never assume that we understand the reason for a mitzvah. In the instance of most mitzvot, we explore possible reasons for a mitzvah in order to enhance our experience when we observe it. This we do, when we can. However, I have not found any commentary that endeavors to explain what it is about these eight specific creeping creatures, but not any of the others, that generates tumah.

Utensils that become tamei

Returning to our passage, after mentioning the tumah of neveilah and sheretz, the Torah lists eight categories of items that become tamei from contact with neveilah and sheretz. Among the specific items mentioned are: (3) wooden vessels, (4) garments, (5) leather items, (6) sackcloth, (7) vessels described by an obscure clause, “any vessel with which work is performed,” (8) earthenware, (9) food and (10) beverages. Each of these categories has its own specific laws, all of which are hinted at in the pasuk. For reasons that will soon become obvious, I will divide this list into three groups. First we will discuss items 3-7, which I will call, collectively, “immersible utensils.”

(3) Wooden utensils

Wooden vessels become tamei when they have a receptacle which can hold liquid (called a beis kibul) or when people use them and place items atop them, such as a table (Rambam, Hilchos Keilim 4:1). These ideas are intimated by the Torah when it describes wooden vessels.

(4-5) Garments and leather

All types of garments are susceptible to tumah, although there is a dispute among late authorities concerning whether synthetic fabrics can become tamei.

(6) Sacks

Yes, I wrote sacks, not socks. Sackcloth means something manufactured from woven goat's hair or animal hair, such as from the tail-hair of cows (Sifra). In general, goat hair is too coarse for use as clothing, but was used in earlier generations similar to the way that we would use burlap, as a bag or sack for storage or transportation. (There are varieties of goat, such as cashmere and mohair, that produce extremely fine wool used for garments, but most goats do not.)

(7) From slingshots to tefillin

The Torah mentions that any vessel with which work is performed can become tamei from a sheretz. What is included in this category? The Sifra explains that this verse teaches that the following three items become tamei: The sling of a slingshot, tefillin, and the envelope in which one places an amulet.

What do slingshots have in common with tefillin and envelopes?

These are three items that contain a beis kibul, a receptacle to hold something, yet someone might think that they do not qualify as “vessels.” The Torah is teaching that these are considered to be receptacles, or “vessels,” to become tamei. In the case of the sling, it is meant to hold the marble, stone or other projectile, albeit for a very brief period of time. In the case of tefillin, the batim of the tefillin contain the parshiyot, and similarly in the case of an amulet.

(8) Earthenware

Note that I have separated earthenware and not included it under the same category as I treated the other utensils. This is because earthenware has many halachic differences, both lenient and stringent, from all other utensils.

All other utensils fall under one of two categories:

(A) Utensils that do not become tamei, which is a topic we will not be discussing in this article.

(B) Utensils that do become tamei, but which can then become tahor again, after they are immersed in a mikveh or spring. This latter category is called klei shetifah, literally, immersible utensils.

(C) Earthenware vessels fall under a third category, because once they become tamei, the only way they can become tahor again is by breaking them. Immersing them in a mikveh or spring does not make them tahor.

How is earthenware different?

There are also several other ways whereby halachah treats earthenware vessels differently from how it treats immersible utensils. The section of the Torah that I quoted above alludes to four of the ways that earthenware vessels are different from immersible utensils.

Contaminate from outside

(I) Immersible utensils become contaminated when they come in contact with neveilah, sheretz or other tamei sources, regardless as to whether they are touched on their internal surface or on their outside. However, if something tamei touched the outside of an earthenware vessel, it remains tahor. An earthenware vessel contracts tumah only from its inside, and only when it has a beis kibul -- an area that can service as a "container" to hold liquid. As a result, a flat earthenware board or an earthenware fork cannot become tamei since it has no "inside" that holds liquid.

Immersion does not help

(II) As I mentioned above, another way that earthenware vessels are different from other utensils is that once they become tamei, there is no means of making them tahor again, other than breaking them.

Airspace

(III) A third way that earthenware vessels are different from other utensils is that they become tamei if a tamei source, such as a sheretz or neveilah, is suspended inside the airspace of the earthenware vessel, even if the sheretz or neveilah does not touch the vessel. Halachically, there is no difference between the airspace of an earthenware vessel and touching it on the inside -- either way makes the earthenware vessel tamei. Contaminating from the inside

(IV) A fourth way that earthenware vessels are different from other utensils is that a tamei earthenware vessel spreads tumah to any food or beverage that is inside its airspace, even if the food or beverage never touched the vessel directly.

These four laws regarding earthenware vessels are all taught in a few words in the pasuk that I mentioned above: Furthermore, any part of them (that is, the eight tamei creatures) that will fall inside any earthenware vessel, whatever is inside it will become tamei and you shall break it (that is, the earthenware vessel).

The Torah mentions that an earthenware vessel contracts tumah only when something falls inside it, and, furthermore, it does not say that the tamei substance must actually touch the earthenware vessel. Also, note that what is inside the earthenware vessel becomes tamei, even if it did not touch the vessel. And, lastly, upon becoming tamei, the Torah mentions only one solution for the earthenware vessel --breaking it. There is no other way to make it tahor.

(11) Ovens and stoves

Let us return to the pesukim quoted above. At this point, we will discuss other halachos germane to earthenware vessels. The above-quoted passage states: Anything on which part of a carcass falls will become tamei. An oven or stove should be destroyed, because they are tamei, and when you use them, they will be tamei.

The ovens of the era of the Torah and Chazal were made of earthenware. Their shape was somewhat similar to a large donut, meaning they were completely open on top and bottom. The open bottom was placed over a hollow in the ground, and then the outside of the oven was lined with mud or clay to insulate it well. Fuel was placed inside the oven and kindled by means of an opening in the side. The food being cooked or baked was placed inside either through this opening or from on top. When they were used this way as ovens, the open top was covered, usually with a piece of earthenware. When these ovens were used as stoves, the pots of food were placed on the open top.

My reasons for explaining these facts is not as an archaeologist, but so that we can understand better both the pasuk of the Torah and the halachah. Although ovens and stoves were made of earthenware, the Torah mentions them under a different heading. This is because other earthenware vessels become tamei only when they have a beis kibul, a receptacle. Following this definition, earthenware ovens and stoves should not become tamei, since they have no bottom. The Torah teaches that ovens and stoves are susceptible to tumah, and have the rules of other earthenware vessels, notwithstanding the fact that they have no beis kibul.

There are halachic ramifications of this distinction, but we will not discuss that in this article. The intrepid reader is referred to a halachic discussion in Ohalos 12:1, and the commentaries thereon.

Conclusion

This article has served as an introduction to some of the basic rules of tumah and taharah, particularly as they relate to utensils. We hope and pray to be able to observe all of these laws soon.

* This translation follows Malbim.

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

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

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*Ohr Somayach :: Talmud Tips :: Chullin 107-113
For the week ending 30 March 2019 / 23 Adar II 5779*

*Rabbi Moshe Newman
A Kosher Taste of Treif*

Yalsa said to Rav Nachman (her husband), "I want to eat something that has the taste of meat and milk."

Yalsa was not merely expressing her desire to taste meat and milk together, knowing quite well that it is forbidden and that she would not be able to fulfill this wish. Rather, she was asking her husband Rav Nachman to teach her what she could eat in a permitted way that has the same flavor as eating milk and meat together. He complied with her request by instructing the cooks to roast an udder for her, thereby providing her with a kosher way of eating meat and milk together.

Prior to this request, Yalsa had already stated her certainty that "Everything which the Torah prohibited, something similar to it was permitted." In other words, for every prohibited food and prohibited "taste" that is taught in the Torah, there exists in the world a "parallel" and similar permitted taste. How did she know this concept of similarity?

She told Rav Nachman: "The Torah prohibited eating blood, but it permitted eating liver (which is entirely congealed blood, and has the taste of blood -- Rashi): The Torah prohibited the cheilev of a beheima (forbidden fat from a domestic animal, such as a cow, sheep or goat), but it permitted eating the cheilev of a chaya (a non-domesticated animal, such as a deer): The Torah prohibited eating a pig, but it permitted eating the brain of a shibuta (a brain of a type of kosher fish called shibuta, which has the same taste as the taste of pig -- Rashi).

I've heard a non-sourced tradition that there are 700 types of kosher fish, all of which were exiled along with the Jewish People from the Land of Israel to Bavel after the destruction of the First Temple. Over time, the various types of kosher fish returned "home" to the Land, with the exception of the shibuta. But with the Mashiah's arrival, may it be speedily in our days, the shibuta will also return to the Land of Israel. But please don't quote me on this!

There's an important message in there being a permitted kosher taste that matches every forbidden non-kosher taste in the world. One might think that the Torah banned non-kosher foods because they are disgusting in essence. However, this is not the reason why certain foods are not kosher. Any food that is not kosher is due to a command from Above that it is forbidden. Something being not kosher is "a decree from the King," without any reason that our limited human understanding can grasp.

And this is the message that Yalsa is conveying in our sugya: Don't think that the Torah prohibited certain tastes -- such as blood and certain fats -- because they are disgusting. If this would be true, then why would there exist other foods with the same tastes that are permitted? Rather, the taste of the item is not the reason it is prohibited. The ban is solely due to "the decree of the King." Yalsa therefore reasoned that there should also exist a food that is permitted, despite its having the taste of meat and milk. She desired to taste it, and asked her husband Rav Nachman to assist her to fulfill her wish. Rav Nachman's reply to have an udder roasted for her not only displayed his honor to his wife, but also provided validation for her thesis that any food forbidden by the Torah is forbidden purely due to "the decree of the King" -- and not for any other reason. (Maharsha) © 2018 Ohr Somayach International