

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

Shemini

April 6th 2013 – 26th Nissan (11th day of Omer)

Rosh Chodesh Iyar is Thursday April 11
Continue Yehi Shem through Rosh Chodesh

In Memory of Yosef Mordechai Ben Rachel

Our condolences to the Haddad Family on the loss of their matriarch, Mrs. Norma Haddad, Norma bat Sarah and especially to her children, Eddie Haddad, Charlie S Haddad, Paula Hamway, to her grand children, great grand children and great great grandchildren.

And to my friend Jack Doueck on the loss of his mom Annette bat Virginia

To the Rudy family on the loss of Cecilia Rudy -Seti bat Bahiye

Happy Birthday to Chantelle and to my dad Abal 120 Happy and Healthy years!

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Editors Notes

I want to begin by thanking all of you again for your messages of condolence to Chantelle. We are still in Florida. We came down Monday before the Seders. As we pack up to go back home, I think of how amazing it is that Hashem helps in planning even the little details. Weeks before we left, my wife shipped down all of our clothes and everything we would need. Had she not, I doubt we could have gotten ourselves together with everything going on in the days before we left.

When we arrived here, everything was set up. Thanks to my sister Ellen and my brother in law Isaac for being such tremendous hosts. Thanks to Jonah and Lauren who went out and filled the house with everything we might need. To Abie Esses for graciously hosting the Seders and Friday night and ensuring as he does every year that everything was beautiful and ran smoothly. We are indebted in appreciation that you make us part of your holiday each year.

Yesterday (Wednesday – although I'm not sure when we'll finally send the newsletter as I find it more and more difficult to do this remotely via lap top – must be age, eyesight and lack of patience), we rented a boat and circled the inlet along Miami from the North down to the South and back again. Chantelle grew up with boats and it was great to see her drive with such expertise that no matter where I sat she could splash me. Her dad taught her well.

There was a large Satmar family out for the same two hours. When we both returned to the dock, we started to speak together. I lost my hat and one of the guys on their boat lost his kippah. It was funny seeing a Hasid make a beracha with his shirt sleeve over his head as one typically sees this is our neck of the woods. In a moment though, one lady spotted Chantelle and it turns out they knew each other. I walked over to the older patriarch and asked what Torah thoughts came to his mind while traveling on the boat.

He responded, that seeing the beauty in nature combined with the beauty in the buildings that man has erected, all he could think about was, Mah Rabu Maasecha – How great are your works, Hashem! Do we appreciate the seichel that Hashem has bestowed upon man to be able to build what we have built? Do we appreciate the beauty in life? Do we stop for a moment to "smell the roses"?

Its rare for us to take the time to stop and reflect.

During the holiday I was discussing why Hashem would really want us to stop in the spring and go through such pains to rid our homes of Chametz, pull out the Kosher dishes, prepare different foods and make such drastic changes. The thought came to me that just as we do this in Passover, we make equally drastic changes at the opposite end of the calendar on Sukkot by moving outside our homes. I suggested that perhaps among the other messages, Hashem is staying stop. Get out of your routine. Put away the cell phone and the Ipad. Step back and look around. Get off the merry go round and experience the moment. Experience your family. Experience the world around you. It's really incredible out there, but you have to notice it to appreciate it.

My father in law had a favorite Pitgam that he would often repeat. Who is the wealthy one, the one is is happy with what he has! Jerry grew up with a so called "silver spoon". From his childhood, he had everything. But he also had many yisurim – pains or afflictions from Heaven. Some which few of us could bear and many which came in the last decade of his life. Still he always had a smile as anyone who knew him would attest. He was satisfied with very little and took joy in the things that most of us ignore. He traveled often and once wrote Chantelle that although we are supposed to be satisfied with what we have, he sees that most people in the world never are. But no matter their level of dissatisfaction, those same people go to pieces when even a bit of what they have is taken away.

Why do we so often, only appreciate what we have lost?

We have just completed Pesach. Many of us traveled with family or at least got together with family. We took time to be with our children or grandchildren. We took time to stop and see the beauty in life. Let's make a commitment to take part of Pesach back home with us. As the spring blossoms, let's take a moment each day to appreciate what we have, to think about and to look up to the Creator and say thanks. As the flowers bloom, lets take a moment to stop and smell the roses!

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

PS This Sunday is Holocaust Remembrance Day – YoM HaShoah. Please plan something meaningful with your family.

PS Friends, You may recall that in years passed, we have spoken about Norpac: the largest pro-Israel PAC in the US (AIPAC is not a PAC despite its name). The Norpac Mission to Washington is scheduled for Yom Yerushalaim, Wednesday, May 8. The attached flyer describes the event.

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st & 2nd Aliyot: The Parsha begins on Nissan 1, 2449. The seven-day inauguration of Aharon and his sons was completed and the ceremonies for the Mizbeach's consecration had begun. Over 40 offerings would be brought on that first day, each requiring the direct ministrations of Aharon. Aharon blessed the nation with the standard priestly blessing after which Moshe and Aharon blessed the nation with the special Bracha of Psalm 90.

3rd Aliya: The deaths of Nadav and Avihu are recorded at the very same time that fire descended from heaven to light the Mizbeach. Their cousins removed the bodies of Nadav and Avihu from the courtyard of the Mishkan. Moshe instructs Aharon and his two remaining sons, Elazar and Isamar, that they are forbidden to overtly mourn the deaths of Nadav and Avihu in the standard manner. It is from here that we are taught the standard practices of tearing Kriyah and of mourners not cutting their hair.

4th & 5th Aliyot: Moshe instructs Aharon and his sons to continue the service of the Mizbeach's consecration. The first recorded difference in Halachik rulings is recorded between Moshe and Aharon as it pertained to the eating of the Rosh Chodesh offering. (Note 16-20, Stone Edition ArtScroll pg. 595)

6th Aliya: The basic laws of Kosher and non-Kosher animals, fish, and fowl are recorded. Note that verses 11:4-7 is one of the established proofs for the divine authorship of the Torah.

7th Aliya: The basic laws of purity and impurity are recorded. It is important to clarify that the Torah does not associate "Tummah" impurity and "Taharah" purity with good and bad. The entire process involves the concept of life and death and the symbolic emphasis that the Torah places on serving G-d with optimism and vigor. So long as there is life there is the opportunity to grow in our relationship with G-d.

The question of "Why are we commanded to keep Kosher?" is answered in 11:44-47. The Torah clearly states that the reason to keep Kosher is to emulate G-d's sanctity. Sanctity "Kedusha" means being set

apart and different. Just as G-d is apart from all things and divine in every way, so too are we to be set apart from all other nations and be different in the manner of our eating.

Yishayah 27-28 - This week's Haftorah takes place in 2892 869 b.c.e. Dovid had captured the City of Dovid from the Yevussi and wished to bring the Aron Hakodesh (Holy Ark) to what would become Yerushalayim. With great fanfare and celebration Dovid was bringing the Aron when Uzah ben Avinadav disgraced the Aron and died.

Reminiscent of the deaths of Nadav and Avihu at the consecration of the Mizbeach, the death of Uzah dampened the celebration and the Aron remained in the home of Oved for three months. When Dovid was informed of the tremendous blessings that had graced the home of Oved during those three months Dovid decided that it was appropriate to bring the Aron to Jerusalem.

Dovid, despite Michal's objection (daughter of Saul and Dovid's wife), danced and celebrated before the Aron without restraint or inhibition while bringing the Aron into the City of Dovid.

Dovid asked permission from the prophet Nassan to build the Bais Hamikdash. Nassan told him that it was G-d's will that his son Shlomo (Solomon) not Dovid build the Bais Hamikdash. Dovid accepted G-d's decree but spent the remainder of his life preparing the materials and the means for his son to be able to build the Bais Hamikdash

RABBI ELI MANSOUR
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Understanding Humility

The events described in Parashat Shemini offer us a remarkable glimpse into the humble characters of Moshe and Aharon, and an opportunity to examine more closely the concept of humility and its importance in Torah life.

In this Parasha, the Torah tells us of the events of "opening day," the day the Mishkan was inaugurated and Aharon officiated as a Kohen for the very first time. G-d instructed Moshe that Aharon should offer a series of special sacrifices, after which the Shechina, the manifestation of the Divine Presence, would descend upon the Mishkan. Rashi (9:23) tells that after Aharon completed the service, he entered the Mishkan, but, to his disappointment, nothing happened. Aharon's reaction was something which

we hear far too infrequently: "I know that the Almighty is angry with me, and it is because of me that the Shechina has not descended." In other words, Aharon blamed himself. Whereas most people tend to point fingers at others when things do not go as planned, casting accusations in every which direction except inward, Aharon placed the blame squarely upon himself, figuring that the Shechina did not descend because of his role in the sin of the golden calf. Aharon took the blame for the Shechina's absence.

Rashi continues that Moshe joined Aharon inside the Mishkan, prayed to G-d, and then the Shechina arrived. When Moshe returned outside, he said to the people, "My brother Aharon is worthier and more prominent than me, for it was through his sacrifices and service that the Shechina shall reside among you." We might have excused Moshe for feeling some degree of pride for bringing the Shechina, but this is not what he did. Quite to the contrary – he credited Aharon for this achievement, going so far as to explicitly say that Aharon was superior.

These events, as mentioned, provide a powerful lesson in humility. Humility means recognizing that we cannot take credit for our achievements. Most people try taking credit for even that which they did not do. Moshe and Aharon show us that we should avoid priding ourselves and seeking recognition even for that which we actually do.

Why is this so, and how does one develop this quality?

Quite simply, humility is about recognizing that everything we have is from G-d. Imagine a person receiving a million-dollar gift and then priding himself over his wealth. How can he take pride for something he did nothing to achieve? Well, this is actually the situation that each and every one of us finds himself in. Nothing we have is our own; it is all given to us by G-d. Even if we achieve through our intelligence and hard work, we must ask ourselves in all honesty, who enabled us to do that? G-d gives us our intelligence and energy, and He can take it away from us whenever He decides, in an instant. And, as we all know, there are no guarantees of success, no matter how bright one is, how hard he works, and how well-connected he is. We have nothing without G-d – not wealth, not intelligence, not health, not our families, not our intellectual achievements. So it is absurd for us to take pride in our accomplishments, every one of which is a gift granted to us by Hashem.

One of the most striking examples of humility told in the Torah is Abraham Abinu's declaration, "Anochi

Afar Ve'efer" – "I am but earth and ash" (Bereshit 18:27). Why did Abraham compare himself specifically to "earth and ash"? The Rabbi of Brisk explained that earth has no meaningful past, but has the potential for a great future, as it can produce valuable and nourishing vegetation, and majestic trees. Ash is just the opposite – it cannot be used for anything of significance in the present or future, but it was, in the past, something of significance. Abraham tells G-d that he is both earth and ash; he has accomplished nothing on his own in the past, and can accomplish nothing on his own in the future. As a human being, he is entirely dependent on G-d for everything. He cannot take any credit for his achievements in the past, and cannot look forward to any independent accomplishments in the future.

Humility assumes such an important role in Torah life because it is a natural outgrowth of our belief in G-d's unlimited control over us and over the world. When we live with this awareness, we understand just how absurd it is to seek honor and recognition, and why we should be focusing our attention instead on bringing honor to the One who truly deserves it – the Almighty.

Rabbi Wein

After the seven days of excitement and joy upon the consecration of the Mishkan and the installation of Aharon and his sons as the priests of Israel devoted to the service of God and humans, tragedy strikes the family of Aharon and all of Israel. The commentators to Torah as well as the Talmud itself searched for the causes that created this sad situation. They attempted to answer the omnipresent question of life – why do bad things seemingly happen to good people? And there is a corollary question involved here as well – why did tragedy strike then and there?

Far be it for me to venture into explanations where greater people than I have been troubled and found it difficult to properly answer these questions. The will of God remains inscrutable to all of us in all times and in all circumstances. Yet Judaism, in its essence, remains a religion of logic and rationality, all rumors to the contrary notwithstanding.

Maimonides bids us to attempt to understand and explain all of God's commandments and human events to the best of our rational abilities. So, these most basic questions of human existence and personal and national purpose, of reward and punishment and Divine justice must command our attention, even if at the end of our search we still will come up somewhat short on satisfying answers. The questions underlying the events described in the

parsha of Shmini go to the heart of Jewish faith and worldview. They require investigation and serious analysis.

A review of the opinions expressed in Talmud and by the commentators, do not at first glance reveal any major transgressions on the part of Nadav and Avihu. True, Aharon's role in helping create the Golden Calf may explain his being brought to grieving for his two eldest sons, but it was Nadav and Avihu who died, not Aharon.

Their sins seem to be only minor human foibles that are common to almost all of us – unwillingness to bear the responsibilities of marriage and parenthood, personal ambition to lead the people and overzealousness in their worship of God and in the service of the Mishkan by introducing a ritual of different fire on the altar not commanded by God. We see here, once again, that the Torah places great emphasis on the small things in life, on the details and not only on the grand sweep of things.

Small mistakes often lead to great tragedies. And the Torah teaches us that personal failures that can be tolerated in most humans are magnified and are not overlooked when they occur to people in positions of power and leadership. The scale of Heavenly tolerance, so to speak, is a sliding one, dependent on the status, accomplishments, abilities and public position of the human person being judged.

There is a special sin offering reserved for the leader of Israel. The accepted usual sin offering is insufficient if we are dealing with the sins of leadership. This is one of the key lessons of this parsha. God's justice is personal and exacting. Nadav and Avihu are the prime examples of this truism.

Sir Jonathan Sacks Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth

Fire - Holy and Unholy

The shock is immense. For several weeks and many chapters – the longest prelude in the Torah – we have read of the preparations for the moment at which G-d would bring His presence to rest in the midst of the people. Five sedrot (Terumah, Tetzaveh, Ki Tissa, Vayakhel and Pekudei) describe the instructions for building the sanctuary. Two (Vayikra, Tzav) detail the sacrificial offerings to be brought there. All is now ready. For seven days the priests (Aaron and his sons) are consecrated into office.

Now comes the eighth day when the service of the mishkan will begin. The entire people have played their part in constructing what will become the visible home of the Divine presence on earth. With a simple, moving verse the drama reaches its climax: "Moses and Aaron went into the Tent of Meeting and when they came out, they blessed the people. G-d's glory was then revealed to all the people."

Just as we think the narrative has reached closure, a terrifying scene takes place:

Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, took their censers, put fire into them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before G-d, which He had not instructed them to offer. Fire came forth from before G-d, and it consumed them so that they died before G-d. Moses then said to Aaron: "This is what G-d spoke of when he said: Among those who approach Me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honoured." (10:1-3)

Celebration turned to tragedy. The two eldest sons of Aaron die. The sages and commentators offer many explanations. Nadav and Avihu died because: they entered the holy of holies; they were not wearing the requisite clothes; they took fire from the kitchen, not the altar; they did not consult Moses and Aaron; nor did they consult one another. According to some they were guilty of hubris. They were impatient to assume leadership roles themselves; and they did not marry, considering themselves above such things. Yet others see their deaths as delayed punishment for an earlier sin, when, at Mount Sinai they "ate and drank" in the presence of G-d (Ex. 24: 9-11).

These interpretations represent close readings of the four places in the Torah which Nadav and Avihu's death is mentioned (Lev. 10:2, 16: 1, Num. 3: 4, 26: 61), as well as the reference to their presence on Mount Sinai. Each is a profound meditation on the dangers of over-enthusiasm in the religious life. However, the simplest explanation is the one explicit in the Torah itself. Nadav and Avihu died because they offered unauthorized (literally "strange") fire – meaning "that which was not commanded." To understand the significance of this we must go back to first principles and remind ourselves of the meaning of kadosh, "holy", and thus of mikdash as the home of the holy.

The holy is that segment of time and space G-d has reserved for His presence. Creation involves concealment. The word olam, universe, is semantically linked to the word neelam, "hidden". To give mankind some of His own creative powers – the

use of language to think, communicate, understand, imagine alternative futures and choose between them – G-d must do more than create homo sapiens. He must efface Himself (what the kabbalists called tzimtzum) to create space for human action. No single act more profoundly indicates the love and generosity implicit in creation. G-d as we encounter Him in the Torah is like a parent who knows He must hold back, let go, refrain from intervening, if his children are to become responsible and mature.

But there is a limit. To efface himself entirely would be equivalent to abandoning the world, deserting his own children. That, G-d may not and will not do. How then does G-d leave a trace of his presence on earth?

The biblical answer is not philosophical. A philosophical answer (I am thinking here of the mainstream of Western philosophy, beginning in antiquity with Plato, in modernity with Descartes) would be one that applies universally – i.e. at all times, in all places. But there is no answer that applies to all times and places. That is why philosophy cannot and never will understand the apparent contradiction between divine creation and human freewill, or between divine presence and the empirical world in which we reflect, choose and act.

Jewish thought is counter-philosophical. It insists that truths are embodied precisely in particular times and places. There are holy times (the seventh day, seventh month, seventh year, and the end of seven septennial cycles, the jubilee). There are holy people (the children of Israel as a whole; within them, the Levi'im, and within them the Cohanim). And there is holy space (eventually, Israel; within that, Jerusalem; within that the Temple; in the desert, they were the mishkan, the holy, and the holy of holies).

The holy is that point of time and space in which the presence of G-d is encountered by tzimtzum – self-renunciation – on the part of mankind. Just as G-d makes space for man by an act of self-limitation, so man makes space for G-d by an act of self-limitation. The holy is where G-d is experienced as absolute presence. Not accidentally but essentially, this can only take place through the total renunciation of human will and initiative. That is not because G-d does not value human will and initiative. To the contrary: G-d has empowered mankind to use them to become His "partners in the work of creation".

However, to be true to G-d's purposes, there must be times and places at which humanity experiences the reality of the divine. Those times and places require absolute obedience. The most fundamental mistake –

the mistake of Nadav and Avihu – is to take the powers that belong to man's encounter with the world, and apply them to man's encounter with the Divine. Had Nadav and Avihu used their own initiative to fight evil and injustice they would have been heroes. Because they used their own initiative in the arena of the holy, they erred. They asserted their own presence in the absolute presence of G-d. That is a contradiction in terms. That is why they died.

We err if we think of G-d as capricious, jealous, angry – a myth spread by early Christianity in an attempt to define itself as the religion of love, superseding the cruel/harsh/retributive G-d of the "Old Testament". When the Torah itself uses such language it "speaks in the language of humanity" – that is to say, in terms people will understand.

In truth, Tenakh is a love story through and through – the passionate love of the Creator for His creatures, that survives all the disappointments and betrayals of human history. G-d needs us to encounter Him, not because He needs mankind but because we need Him. If civilization is to be guided by love, justice, and respect for the integrity of creation as such, there must be moments in which we leave the "I" behind and encounter the fullness of being in all its glory. That is the function of the holy – the point at which "I am" is silent in the overwhelming presence of "There is". That is what Nadav and Avihu forgot – that to enter holy space or time requires ontological humility, the total renunciation of human initiative and desire.

The significance of this fact cannot be over-estimated. When we confuse G-d's will with our will, we turn the holy (the source of life) into something unholy and a source of death. The classic example of this is "holy war" – investing imperialism (the desire to rule over other people) with the cloak of sanctity as if conquest and forced conversion were G-d's will. The story of Nadav and Avihu reminds us yet again of the warning first spelled out in the days of Cain and Abel. The first act of worship led to the first murder. Like nuclear fission, worship generates power, which can be benign but can also be profoundly dangerous.

The episode of Nadav and Avihu is written in three kinds of fire. First there is the fire from heaven:

Fire came forth from before G-d and consumed the burnt offering . . . (9: 24)

This was the fire of favour, consummating the service of the sanctuary. Then came the "unauthorized fire" offered by the two sons.

Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before G-d, which He had not instructed them to offer. (10:1)

Then there was the counter-fire from heaven:

Fire came forth from before G-d, and it consumed them so that they died before G-d. (10:2)

The message is simple and deadly serious: Religion is not what the European Enlightenment thought it would become: mute, marginal and mild. It is fire – and like fire, it warms but it also burns. And we are the guardians of the flame.

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