**SALT – PARASHAT SHEMINI 5782 / 2022**

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Motzaei Shabbat

The opening section of Parashat Shemini tells of the events that occurred on the first day when Aharon and his sons served as *kohanim* in the *Mishkan*, following their seven-day consecration process. God commanded the offering of a series of special sacrifices, and after they were offered, a heavenly fire descended onto the altar and consumed them. The Torah relates that the people reacted by “*va-yaronu*” (9:24), which Onkelos translates as “*ve-shabachu*” – “they praised.”

Rashi cites this verse in his commentary to Shir Hashirim (1:16), in explaining the verse, “*Hinekha yafeh dodi af naim*” – “Behold, my beloved, you are beautiful and pleasant.” The maiden, symbolizing *Am Yisrael*, says about her beloved – symbolizing God – that he is “*yafeh*” (“beautiful”) and “*naim*” (“pleasant”). Rashi writes that the term “*naim*” in this verse refers to the fact that “You forgave my sins and had Your presence rest in my midst.” God’s “pleasantness,” according to Rashi, is expressed through His having forgiven *Benei Yisrael* for the sin of the golden calf and taking residence in the *Mishkan* despite this grave act of betrayal. Rashi adds that this verse in Shir Hashirim is the praise that the people proclaimed when the fire descended to consume the sacrifices on the first day of the *Mishkan*’s operation, representing the arrival of the *Shekhina* (divine presence). The people exclaimed, “*Hinekha yafeh dodi af naim*” – praising God for His “pleasantness” in being willing to reside among them despite their sin.

[Rav Chaim Feinstein](http://beinenu.com/sites/default/files/alonim/232_26_81_2.pdf) insightfully notes that Rashi’s comments shed light on his comments to the previous verse in Parashat Shemini, identifying the blessing which Moshe and Aharon pronounced to *Benei Yisrael* after the sacrifices were offered. The Torah (9:23) relates that Moshe and Aharon blessed the people, and Rashi, based on *Torat Kohanim*, explains that they declared the verse, “*Vi-yhi noam Hashem Elokeinu aleinu*” – “May the ‘pleasantness’ of the Lord our God be upon us” (Tehillim 90:17). According to Rashi’s explanation of the verse in Shir Hashirim, the word “*noam*” in this blessing may be understood as referring to the “pleasantness” of God residing among the people despite their wrongdoing, and thus Moshe and Aharon wished the people that they should always enjoy this privilege of the *Shekhina*’s presence among them.

Rav Feinstein adds that this understanding of “*naim*” may also enhance our understanding of the famous verse in Tehillim (133:1), “*Hinei ma tov u-ma* ***naim*** *shevet achim gam yachad*” – “Behold, how good and **pleasant** it is, brothers sitting together.” Just as God’s presence among *Am Yisrael* is described as “*naim*,” similarly, when people join together in friendship and camaraderie, this creates a special aura of “pleasantness.”

As mentioned, Rashi explains the word “*naim*” as referring not simply to God’s taking residence among the people, but His willingness to do so despite their having betrayed Him through the worship of the golden calf. Accordingly, we might suggest that in the verse “*Hinei ma tov u-ma naim*,” too,” the word “*naim*” refers to forgiveness, being prepared to sit and bond with people by whom one had been wronged. There is a special “pleasantness” created when we are forgiving and forbearing, when we accept and embrace people despite their faults and failings. When we overlook each other’s mistakes, and are willing to bond together with compassion and magnanimity, we experience true “*noam*,” the unparalleled “pleasantness” of a relationship that is based upon genuine respect and goodwill.

Sunday

The opening section of Parashat Shemini tells of the special sacrifices which God commanded offering on the first day when Aharon and his sons functioned as *kohanim*, ministering in the *Mishkan*, following their seven-day *miluim* (consecration) process. Aharon himself brought one animal as an *ola* (burnt offering) and another as a sin-offering, and the nation brought an animal as an *ola* and two animals as a *chatat*.

Aharon’s *chatat* offering brought on this day differed from most *chatat* sacrifices in that the meat was not eaten by the *kohanim*. Normally, the fats of the *chatat* are placed on the altar, and the *kohanim* partake of the meat. In this instance, however, the meat was taken outside the camp and burned (9:11). In this sense, Aharon’s sin-offering resembled the *par hei’alem davar shel tzibur* – the special sin-offering brought when the entire nation mistakenly committed a sin involving idolatry – and the sin-offering brought by a *kohen gadol* to atone for wrongdoing. The meat of both these offerings are burned, and not eaten (see Vayikra 4:11-12, 21). This feature is shared also by the special sin-offerings brought on Yom Kippur (Vayikra 16:27).

However, as Rashi (9:11) notes, Aharon’s sin-offering on the first day he served as *kohen gadol* was unique from all other sacrifices – differing even from the exceptional offerings mentioned earlier – in that its meat was burned and its blood was sprinkled on the outdoor altar. When it comes to all the aforementioned exceptional sin-offerings, whose meat is burned and not eaten, the blood of the sacrifice is sprinkled on the incense altar inside the *Beit Ha-mikdash* (see Vayikra 4:7, 4:18, 16:18-19). Aharon’s sin-offering, Rashi writes, was unique in that its blood was sprinkled on the outdoor altar (the *mizbach ha-ola*) and its meat was burned instead of being eaten. The blood of all other sin-offerings which are burnt is sprinkled on the incense altar. The only other exceptions, as Rashi notes, was the sin-offering brought by Aharon and his sons on each of the seven days of the *miluim*. As we read in Parashat Tetzaveh, the blood of this sacrifice was sprinkled on the outdoor altar (Shemot 29:12), yet its meat was burned, and not eaten (29:14).

Chizkuni notes that there seem to be other instances, too, of sin-offerings with this unique feature – that the blood is sprinkled on the outdoor altar, and the meat is burned instead of being eaten. One example is the bull which was offered as a sin-offering at the time when the *Leviyim* were formally consecrated for their role in the *Mishkan*, as we read in Parashat Behaalotekha (Bamidbar 8:8). Rashi, commenting there in Parashat Behaalotekha, cites *Torat Kohanim* as stating that this sin-offering, too, was entirely burned, and not eaten. There is no indication that its blood was sprinkled on the incense altar, and we may thus presume that the blood was sprinkled on the outdoor altar, like the blood of standard sacrifices. Likewise, we read in Sefer Ezra (8:35) of the Jews who returned to Jerusalem from the Babylonian exile and offered goats as sin-offerings which were entirely burned (“*ha-kol ola le-Hashem*”). Presumably, the blood of these offerings was sprinkled on the outdoor altar.

Chizkuni explains that these sacrifices all fall under the category of “*miluim*,” as they were brought for the purpose of consecration – either of the *Leviyim*, or of the Second Temple. Thus, when Rashi said that the only exceptions were the sacrifices offered during the seven-day *miluim* process when Aharon and his sons were consecrated as *kohanim*, this covered also the other exceptions, as they, too, were brought as part of a process of consecration.

Monday

We read in Parashat Shemini of the special sacrifices which were offered on the first day when Aharon and his sons began serving as *kohanim* in the *Mishkan*. This day is called “*yom ha-shemini*” – “the eighth day” – because it followed the seven-day *miluim* period, during which Aharon and his sons were consecrated as *kohanim*. Throughout the seven days of the *miluim*, Moshe functioned as *kohen*, performing the sacrifices which Aharon and his sons brought for the purpose of their consecration.

In describing the events of the eighth day, the Torah tells that Aharon offered all the special sacrifices which God commanded to bring that day, “*milevad olat ha-boker*” – “besides the morning burnt-offering” (9:17). This clearly refers to the daily *tamid* sacrifice, which is brought twice each day – every morning and afternoon. The Torah here emphasizes that the special sacrifices offered in honor of the first day of Aharon and his sons’ service were brought in addition to the standard morning sacrifice which is required each and every day.

The Ramban explains that this point needed to be made because we might have assumed that the *tamid* obligation was fulfilled through one of the special sacrifices offered on this day. These sacrifices included a yearling sheep offered on behalf of the nation as an *ola* (burnt-offering) – which is precisely the sacrifice required for the daily *tamid*. Intuitively, we might have figured that the *tamid* was thus unnecessary that morning, since an animal was in any event being offered as an *ola* on the nation’s behalf. The Torah therefore emphasized that the daily *tamid* was nevertheless offered.

The Ramban then addresses the question of why this point is noted only here, in reference to the sacrifices offered on the first day of Aharon and his sons’ service as *kohanim*, and not also in regard to the sacrifices offered during through previous seven days. God issued the command of the daily *tamid* sacrifices immediately following the instructions concerning the consecration of the *kohanim*, as we read in Parashat Tetzaveh (Shemot 29:38-42). As such, this command seemingly applied even during the consecration process. Why, then, did the Torah not clarify in discussing the seven days of the *miluim* that the special sacrifices offered on these days were brought in addition to the *tamid*, and that the *ola* offered as part of the *miluim* (29:18) did not suffice as the *tamid* – just as the Torah does in reference to the special sacrifices offered on the eighth day?

The Ramban answers that this clarification was unnecessary in the context of the *miluim*, because the sacrifices offered then were personal, private offerings. Those sacrifices were brought by Aharon and his sons only on their own behalf, and not on behalf of the entire nation. It was thus self-evident that these sacrifices could not take the place of the daily *tamid* brought on behalf of all *Benei Yisrael*, and purchased with public funds. The special sacrifices offered on the eighth day, however, included an *ola* brought on behalf of the nation, and thus the Torah needed to clarify that this offering did not take the place of the daily *tamid*.

The Ra’avad, in his commentary to *Torat Kohanim* (here in Parashat Shemini), advances a different view. In direct contrast to the Ramban, he asserts that the *tamid* sacrifice was not, in fact, offered during the seven-day *miluim* period, and it was brought for the first time on the eighth day. According to the Ra’avad, although God presented the command of the *tamid* in conjunction with the command concerning the *kohanim*’s consecration, this does not mean that the *tamid* was to be offered during the consecration process. The command was presented at that time but took effect only later, on the eighth day, when the *kohanim* began serving in the *Mishkan* for the first time.

Tuesday

The opening verses of Parashat Shemini tell of the special sacrifices which God commanded offering on the “eighth day” – meaning, the day following the seven-day *miluim* period, during which Aharon and his sons were consecrated as *kohanim*. On this eighth day, Aharon and his sons began serving as *kohanim* for the first time. God commanded Aharon to offer two personal sacrifices on this day, and He commanded that a series of sacrifices be offered on behalf of the nation: a goat as a *chatat* (sin-offering), a calf and sheep as an *ola*; and an ox and ram as a *shelamim* (in addition to a flour offering – 9:3-4).

This *shelamim* sacrifice marks a rare instance of a public *shelamim* offering. Normally, the *shelamim* sacrifice – which is offered not for atonement, but rather for the purpose of festive celebration – is brought only by individuals or groups of individuals, who then share the meat (except for a small portion – the *chazeh* and *shok* – which is given to the *kohanim*). Here, however, we find a public sacrifice offered as a *shelamim*. The only such sacrifice required by the Torah are the *kivsei atzeret* – the two sheep offered as part of the special *shetei ha-lechem* offering brought on Shavuot, as we read in Parashat Emor (23:19). The Mishna in Masekhet Zevachim (5:5) establishes that this sacrifice brought on Shavuot differs from all other *shelamim* sacrifices, as it is bound by the restrictions that apply to the higher-level sacrifices. Namely, the meat of the sacrifice may be eaten only by *kohanim*, only within the Temple courtyard, and only through the night following the sacrifice’s slaughtering. This is in contrast to other *shelamim* offerings, which may be eaten by anybody, throughout the city of Jerusalem, and until the end of the next day (with the notable exception of the *toda*, which may be eaten only through the night after the sacrifice is slaughtered).

The question arises as to whether this was the case also with regard to the public *shelamim* sacrifice offered on the “eighth day,” the day Aharon and his sons began serving as *kohanim*. We might assume that as a rare public *shelamim* offering, it followed the only other precedent of such a sacrifice – the *kivsei atzeret*, and its meat was thus eaten only by the *kohanim*, bound by the restrictions that apply to higher-level sacrifices.

Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, in his *Meshekh Chokhma*, asserts that the *kohanim* partook of this sacrifice, but as representatives of the people. In his view, this offering was, in fact, a standard *shelamim* sacrifice, and not bound by the special restrictions that apply to higher-level sacrifices, but with the exception that only the *kohanim* ate the meat.

Malbim (commenting to 9:18), however, disagrees, and maintains that the meat of this sacrifice was distributed among the people, just as the meat of a standard *shelamim* is eaten by those who bring the sacrifice (except the *chazeh* and *shok*, which are given to the *kohanim*). According to Malbim, as the nation were the ones who brought this *shelamim*, this meat belonged to them, and this sacrifice did not follow the exceptional model of the *kivsei atzeret*, which is eaten only by the *kohanim*.

Malbim explains on this basis the Torah’s terminology in telling of Aharon performing this *shelamim* sacrifice. The Torah writes that Aharon offered “*zevach ha-shelamim* ***asher la-am***” – “the *shelamim* offering which was for the nation.” Surprisingly, the Torah found it necessary to emphasize that this was the nation’s sacrifice, even though this was the only *shelamim* offered that day. Earlier (9:15), in telling of Aharon performing the nation’s *ola* and *chatat* sacrifices, the Torah emphasizes that they were “the people’s” offerings, to clarify that it speaks of the nation’s offerings, and not Aharon’s personal *ola* and *chatat*. With regard to the *shelamim* sacrifice, however, this emphasis appears superfluous, since there was only a single *shelamim* offered, and it thus seemingly would have sufficed for the Torah to state simply that Aharon offered the *shelamim* sacrifice, without specifying that it was the nation’s sacrifice. Malbim explains that the words “*asher la-am*” were added to note that this was the nation’s sacrifice, and they partook of the meat. Unlike the other public *shelamim* offering – the *kivsei atzeret* – which is eaten exclusively by the *kohanim*, this *shelamim* was distributed among the people, just like a standard *shelamim* sacrifice is eaten by the person or persons who offer it. The Torah therefore emphasized that this was the people’s offering – “*asher la-am*” – and was given to them to be eaten, rather than being reserved for the *kohanim*. (From a practical perspective, as some have noted, Malbim’s understanding seems difficult to accept, as it begs the question of how the meat of one ox and one ram could be distributed among the entire nation, and how it was decided who was given precedence.)

Wednesday

As discussed yesterday, the Torah in Parashat Shemini tells of the special sacrifices offered on the first day Aharon and his sons began serving as *kohanim*, which included sacrifices offered personally by Aharon, and sacrifices offered collectively by all *Benei Yisrael*. One of these public sacrifices was a *shelamim* offering – marking an exceptional situation of a public *shelamim*. As we noted, the *shelamim* normally was brought only by an individual or group of individuals, and not by the entire nation (the lone exception being the “*kivsei atzeret*” – the two sheep brought as a *shelamim* on Shavuot). Generally, a small portion of the *shelamim* was given to the *kohanim*, and the rest of the meat was given to the person or persons who offered the sacrifice, for them to eat or to share with others. The offering of a public *shelamim* on this first day of the *Mishkan*’s operation gives rise to the question of who partook of the meat, as the *be’alim* (“owners,” or people who brought the sacrifice) in this instance were the entire nation. We noted yesterday the theory advanced by Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, in his *Meshekh Chokhma*, claiming that the meat was eaten by the *kohanim* as the nation’s representatives.

At first glance, one might question this theory in light of the Torah’s account of the events that transpired later that day, after tragedy struck, with the sudden death of two of Aharon’s sons. Moshe instructed Aharon and his surviving sons to eat the meat of that day’s special sacrifices despite the tragedy that had just occurred (10:12-15). Whereas generally an *onein* – one whose immediate family member had died but had yet to be buried – is not permitted to partake of sacrificial food, an exception was made for the special sacrifices offered in honor of the *Mishkan*’s inauguration. In speaking to Aharon and his surviving sons, Moshe specified that they should eat the *mincha* (flour offering), and the *chazeh* (chest) and *shok* (thigh) of the *shelamim* sacrifice. The *chazeh* and *shok* are the portions of a *shelamim* given to a *kohen*, while the rest of the meat is given to the *be’alim*. The fact that Moshe instructed Aharon and his sons to eat specifically the *chazeh* and *shok* would, seemingly, indicate that these were the only portions of that day’s *shelamim* eaten by the *kohanim* – in direct contradistinction to the *Meshekh Chokhma*’s claim.

The *Meshekh Chokhma* addresses this question, and suggests a creative explanation for why Moshe specified the *chazeh* and *shok*. The Gemara in Masekhet Zevachim (101a) comments that the prohibition against eating sacrificial food in a state of *aninut* (before the burial of a deceased family member) was suspended that day only with respect to the special sacrifices offered to mark that occasion. Other sacrifices, however, which were not related to the special occasion, remained subject to this prohibition. Specifically, the Gemara notes that this day was Rosh Chodesh Nissan, and, as such, the standard Rosh Chodesh sacrifices were offered on that day. These sacrifices were not allowed to be eaten by Aharon and his surviving sons in their state of *aninut*, because these sacrifices were entirely unrelated to the special occasion of the *Mishkan*’s inauguration. (The Gemara famously explains on this basis the tense exchange between Moshe and Aharon after Moshe realized that the meat of the sin-offering – identified by the Gemara as the Rosh Chodesh sacrifice – was burned and not eaten – 10:16-20.) The *Meshekh Chokhma* applies a somewhat similar distinction to the meat of the *shelamim* sacrifice offered that day. He writes that Aharon and his sons partook of the *chazeh* and *shok* of this sacrifice by virtue of their status as *kohanim*, whereas the rest of the meat was given to them as representatives of the people, and not in the capacity of their role as *kohanim*. The prohibition against eating sacrifices in a state of *aninut* was waived only with regard to the *chazeh* and *shok*, which Aharon and his sons ate as *kohanim*, but not with regard to the rest of the meat, which they ate not as *kohanim*, but rather as the people’s representatives. Only sacrificial food which they ate due to their priestly stature was deemed permissible for consumption in a state of *aninut* due to the unique importance of this day, the first day that Aharon and his sons began serving as *kohanim*. But the meat which, fundamentally, belonged to the entire nation was not allowed to be eaten that day, because its consumption did not override the standard laws restricting the consumption of sacrifices. Therefore, Aharon and his surviving sons were permitted to eat only the *chazeh* and *shok* that day, and the rest of the meat was put aside until the next day, when they were no longer in a state of *aninut*.

We should note, however, that this distinction is not entirely clear. If the standard restrictions were waived due to the special significance of this occasion, then, seemingly, they should have been waived with respect to all the meat of that day’s special sacrifices. It seems difficult to understand why a distinction would be drawn in this regard between the *chazeh* and *shok*, and the rest of the meat of the *shelamim*.

Thursday

The Torah in Parashat Shemini tells of the tragedy that befell Aharon and his family on the day he and his four sons began serving as *kohanim*. His two older sons, Nadav and Avihu, brought an unwarranted incense offering, whereupon a fire burst forth and consumed them.

The Torah relates that Aharon reacted to this tragedy by remaining silent – “*va-yidom Aharon*” (10:3), without challenging God’s judgment. Rashi (10:3), citing the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabba* 12:2), comments that Aharon was rewarded for maintaining his composure. Later (10:8-9), we read that God spoke to Aharon to present the prohibition against serving in the *Mishkan* after drinking wine. This marks the only occasion when God spoke to Aharon alone, without speaking also to Moshe at the same time. Aharon received this special honor – of an exclusive prophecy from God – in reward for remaining silent in the face of a devastating personal tragedy.

The question arises as to why the Midrash linked the command not to enter the *Mishkan* in a state of inebriation, and Aharon’s silence after the death of his sons. Why would this particular prophecy be given as a reward for Aharon’s response to tragedy?

Rav Avraham Borenstein of Sochatchov (cited in *Abir Ha’ro’im*, *Pardeis Yosef*, and elsewhere) explains that the common denominator between these two contexts is *yishuv ha-da’at* – a calm and composed mind. The lesson of the prohibition of *shetuyei yayin* (serving while intoxicated) is that serving God requires composure and clarity of thought. We need to be attentive, focused and clearheaded in order to properly discharge our religious duties. This quality was exemplified by Aharon, who, through his faith and inner strength, remained perfectly composed even in a moment of unimaginable grief. Despite his anguish, Aharon did not lose his bearings, and retained his ability to think and act rationally. And thus the Midrash links Aharon’s response to tragedy with the command of *shetuyei yayin* – to demonstrate the importance of *yishuv ha-da’at* in the service of God.

While few of us will have to endure the kind of sorrow that Aharon experienced that day, we all have moments of pain, frustration, fear, anguish, anger, and other forms of emotional turmoil. The Midrash here urges us to follow Aharon’s inspiring example of composure; to try, as much as we can, not to allow our pain and grief to have an “intoxicating” effect, to cloud our judgment, to lead us to act irrationally or in opposition to our values and principles. We are to strive to maintain our equanimity, our self-control and our poise even in times of emotional unrest, so we can serve God properly and with consistent devotion under all circumstances.

Friday

The Torah in Parashat Shemini discusses the basic principles determining which creatures are permissible for consumption, and which are forbidden. When it comes to animals, one of the properties required for a creature to be permissible is “*ma’ala geira*” (11:3), which is understood as a reference to chewing the cud. Rashi explains that such animals, when they eat, regurgitate the food from the stomach into the mouth and chew it again, breaking it down into especially fine particles. On this basis, Rashi explains Onkelos’ translation of “*geira*” as “*pishra*,” which means “melt” or “dissolve.” The process of chewing the cud is referred to as “dissolving” because it results in the thorough dissolution of the food.

As for the etymology of the word “*geira*,” Rashi cites a verse in Sefer Shemuel II (14:14) that speaks of “*mayim ha-nigarim*” – water that has spilled onto the ground. The word “*geira*” is thus used in reference to food which flows down the mouth into the digestive tract. The expression “*ma’ala geira*,” then, describes the process of bringing the food which had descended into the stomach back up into the mouth (as “*ma’ala*” means “lift” or “bring up”). Chizkuni offers this explanation, as well, but also advances a different theory, associating the word “*geira*” with the familiar word “*garon*” – “throat.” According to this theory, the term “*ma’ala geira*” describes the food’s return to the area of the throat.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch explains the word “*geira*” as related to the word “*megareh*” – “saw,” such that it refers to the animal’s “sawing” its food. Animals that chew their cud, Rav Hirsch writes, do not have incisors in the upper jaw, and have instead what he calls “a hard rough plate” that “saws” the food. As the food is not sufficiently masticated, it must be returned to the mouth a second time for the process to be completed. The expression “*ma’ala geira*,” then, refers to the animal’s bringing up its “*geira*” – the food that has been “sawed” and needs to be broken down further.

Rav Chaim Kanievsky, cited in *Derekh Sicha*, offers an insightful explanation for why “*ma’ala geira*” is regarded as an indicator of an animal’s kosher status. He writes that this extended, complex process of chewing signifies the opposite of laziness. The animal chews its food in an especially thorough manner, repeating the entire process to ensure it is properly completed, symbolizing the importance of patience and diligence in the service of God. Those who are lazy, Rav Kanievsky writes, do not “chew their cud” – they do not take the time and go through the trouble to complete their work thoroughly. They instead recklessly rush through their work, producing a shoddy end result. This law thus teaches the importance of performing our religious duties patiently, thoroughly, and with an eye to detail, giving *mitzvot* the time, attention and commitment that they deserve.