

**Wembley Synagogue**

שמיני

Insights from the commentators into the Sedra of Shemini

..... וַיִּהְיֶה בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי קָרָא מֹשֶׁה - It was on the eighth day... (And Moshe said to Aharon, 'Come near to the altar.' (9:1, 7)

When the *Mishkan* was completed, Moshe acted as *Kohen Gadol* for seven days and trained Aharon. On the eighth day Aharon became the *Kohen Gadol*.

Why did Aharon replace Moshe as the *Kohen Gadol* on the *eighth* day?

For seven days Hashem pleaded with Moshe to be his emissary to deliver the message to Pharaoh to allow the Jews to leave Egypt. Moshe was reluctant to go, due to his speech impediment. Finally, Hashem said, "Since you do not want to go, Aharon, your brother the Levite, shall speak for you (*Shemot* 4:16). Moreover, be advised that originally I planned for him to remain a Levite and for you to be a *Kohen*. Now, because of your reluctance to fulfill the mission, the positions will be reversed: you will be the Levite and he the *Kohen* (*Shemot* 4:14 Rashi).

Hashem conducts Himself with the Jewish people *מִדָּה כְּנֶגְד מִדָּה midah keneged midah* — measure for measure. Therefore, since after seven days of G-d's pleading with him, the position of *Kohen* was taken away from Moshe, now, on the eighth day, when the seven days of inauguration period came to a climax, Aharon was officially consecrated as *Kohen Gadol*. (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה לְאַהֲרֹן וּלְבָנָיו וּלְזִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל - Moshe summoned Aharon and his sons, and the elders of Israel (9:1). Rabbi Akiva says: The Jewish people are compared to a bird. Just as a bird cannot fly without wings, so the Jewish people are helpless without their elders (*Vayikra Rabbah* 11:8) The Midrash *Bereshit Rabba* 65:4) teaches us that originally Isaac looked exactly like his father Avraham. Avraham asked Hashem to make him look older, so that people would not confuse the two. He said "Master of the world! When a man goes somewhere with his son, people will not know which of them to accord honour. If the elderly are crowned with signs of age, people will know to respect them." Hashem replied "Your argument is correct, and I will begin with you." This is the meaning of the verse Now Avraham was old...And Hashem blessed Avraham with everything (*Bereshit* 24:1). Kehillat Yitzchak explains that Avraham saw a danger in young and old being indistinguishable. The wisdom and life experience of older people gives them the ability to guide and advise with wisdom and reason. Young people lack this insight. The Jewish people are like a bird. Just as a bird's ability to soar depends on its wings, the ability of each generation to successfully rise above its challenges depends on its elders offering guidance and direction. (Source: The Torah Treasury)

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל אַהֲרֹן קְרַב אֶל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ (9:7) Rashi comments that Aharon was hesitant to approach the Altar, embarrassed by the role he had played in the sin of the Golden Calf. Moshe told him, "why are you hesitant? לְכֹךָ נִבְחַרְתָּ - For this you were chosen! Understood simply, לְכֹךָ, "for this" refers to the position of *Kohen Gadol*- High Priest. The *Baal Shem Tov*, however, explains that Moshe told Aharon that the reason that he was chosen to be *Kohen Gadol* was because of *this* – his hesitation and sense of unworthiness. *Sfat Emet* notes that a person must strike a delicate balance when approaching a mitzvah. On the one hand, he must think "am I, a mortal tainted with sin, worthy of performing Hashem's will?" However, this feeling must never restrain the person from meeting his responsibilities. He should be heartened by the fact that Hashem commanded *him* to do His will, and he must therefore step forward and joyously perform the mitzvah.

וַיִּשָּׂא אַהֲרֹן אֶת יָדָיו אֶל הָעָם וַיְבָרֵכֶם - Aharon lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them. (9:22)

The plural for "hands" is spelled יָדָיו (*yadav*) with a second *yud*. Why in our *pasuk* is it spelled without a second *yud*?

When a *Kohen* recites the priestly blessing, he is required to raise both hands and put them together. Thus, the two hands look like one. The *Kohen* is also required to place the right hand a bit higher than the left. (See *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 128:12.)

Without a second *yud*, the word "*yadav*" can be read "*yado*" — "his hand." The Torah writes it this way to allude to the fact that Aharon raised his hand (the right hand) a bit higher, and keeping the two together as one, he blessed the people.

וַיָּמָתוּ לִפְנֵי ה' - And they (the sons of Aharon) died before Hashem. (10:2) Why did Nadav and Avihu die? **Rashi** quotes Rabbi Eliezer who says that Aharon's sons dies only because they decided halacha in the presence of Moshe, their teacher (that incense should be offered on the altar). Rabbi Yishmael says that they entered the sanctuary while intoxicated with wine. The proof of this is that after their deaths, the Torah warned the other priests that they may not enter the Sanctuary after having drunk wine (v.8-11). **The Midrash** in Vayikra Rabbah 12:1 says that a king had a personal assistant whom he found hanging around the entrance to the taverns. The king severed his head without explaining why, and appointed another assistant in his place. We would not know why he put the first one to death if he had not told the second one, "you must not enter the entrance of the taverns," from which we know that for this reason he put the first one to death. Similarly, when the Torah states: Fire came out from before Hashem and consumed them, and they dies before G-d," we would not know why they died. But when Aharon is commanded, "do not drink (enough) wine to make (you) intoxicated (v.9), we know that they only dies on account of the wine. **Gur Aryeh** says that the Torah itself specifies the reason why Nadav and Avihu died. They died because "they brought an extraneous fire before Hashem, which He had not commanded them" (v.2). The two reasons which Rashi cites are thus additional explanations as to why they died so quickly. **Maskil LeDavid** says that Rashi was troubled why Nadav and Avihu were killed with fire in particular. Rashi thus explains that their sin was connected to fire, since they decided halacha about offering incense in fire) in the presence of Moshe. Therefore, their punishment was also with fire, measure for measure.

וְאֵת הַחֲרִיבִית... וְאֵת הַשָּׁפָן..... אֵת הַגְּמֹל - The camel for it brings up its cud but its hoof is not split... the hyrax because it will not divide its hoof... the hare...it did not divide its hoof, they are unclean to you. (11:4-6)

Why does the Torah use present tense ("*mafris*"), future tense ("*yafris*"), and past tense ("*hifrisah*")?

Although this *parshah* of the Torah discusses laws pertaining to animals, we can also learn an important lesson which applies to man: Before declaring a person to be *tamei* (unclean/unfit)-rejecting and excluding him, it is necessary to carefully analyse his present, past, and future. When we can be convinced that the past and present are not good and there is absolutely no possibility for improvement in the future, only then may we declare a person unfit. (Source: Peninim on the Torah)

The commentators ponder why the dietary laws were given at this point? (11:1-47)

Abarbanel says that after the Tabernacle was completed and the priests inaugurated, they were given the command not to carry out their service whilst drunk. The Torah explains that "(This is) so that (you will be able) to distinguish between the holy and the profane and between the unclean and the clean." (10:10) Thus it now became necessary for Hashem to inform Moshe and Aharon which creatures were "clean" and which were "unclean."

Sforno says that after Bnei Yisrael had sinned with the golden calf, Hashem said that His presence would not accompany the people to the Land of Israel (Shemot 33:3). Moshe succeeded with his prayers that Hashem should grant Bnei Yisrael the privilege of building the Mishkan (Tabernacle), through which the Divine Presence would return to dwell amongst the Jewish people. Now that this was complete, further mitzvot followed, to continue the process of spiritual refinement of Bnei Yisrael, such as the Dietary Laws and the Laws of Family Purity in the next Sidra of Tazria.

וְאֵת הַחֲסִידָה - And the stork (11:19)

The Chasidah (stork) is listed as one of the non-kosher birds. The Talmud in Chullin 63a explains that its name is derived from the word "chesed" (kindness) because it performs chesed with its friends. The Ramban writes that the birds enumerated in this portion are forbidden to be eaten because of their cruelty. If so, the stork should be permitted because of its kindness. The *Chiddushei Harim* explains that it is forbidden because it is kind only to others of its species but will never give food to a creature not of its own kind. Chesed must be done for everyone, not only for one's friends.

Shabbat Shalom



Shabbat starts 7.39pm



Shabbat ends: 8.45pm

The *Insights into the Sedra* sheet is edited by Chazan Anthony Wolfson

Online at: http://www.wembleysynagogue.org/html/sedra_notes.html