



## Wembley Synagogue

שמיני

### Insights from the commentators into the Sedra of Shemini 5768

#### What's the Sidra about?

**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 "Vehi Noam Hashem" Psalm 90(see Rashi)

**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 Itamar, 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.

**7th Aliya:** The basic laws of purity and impurity are recorded. (Source: Rav Aron Tendler)

**וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי** - It happened on the eighth day (9:1) The Gemara Megillah 10b states that the day on which the Mishkan was dedicated was as joyous for Hashem as the day on which Hashem created the world. R' Shlomo Ganzfried z"l (author of Kitzur Shulchan Aruch) explains this as follows: Hashem's purpose in creating the world was so that He could reside amongst His creations. And, before Adam's sin, Hashem did just that. However, when Adam sinned, he drove Hashem to ascend to the lowest of the seven heavens. When Kayin sinned, Hashem ascended higher still, and so on due to the sins of the generation of Enosh, the generation of the flood, the generation of the Tower of Bavel, the S'domites, and the Egyptians. In all, Hashem ascended to the seventh heaven. The Mishkan was built so that Hashem could again reside amongst the people, as the Torah states (Shemot 25:8): "They will build Me a Mishkan so that I may reside amongst them." Thus, the day on which the Mishkan was dedicated was as joyous for Hashem as the day on which Hashem created the world. (Source: Hamaayan 5758)

**וַיִּקְחוּ בְנֵי-אַהֲרֹן נָדָב וַאֲבִיהוּא אֵשׁ זָרָה** - The sons of Aharon - Nadav and Avihu - each took his pan, and they placed incense in it, and they brought before Hashem a foreign fire which He had not commanded.(10:1) Rashi quotes the Midrash: "Rabbi Yishmael said, `They died because they entered the Sanctuary intoxicated by wine'." Firstly, the Torah tells us why Nadav and Avihu died - they entered the Mishkan with "an alien fire that He had not commanded them!" Why does Rabbi Yishmael offer a different reason? Secondly, how is it possible that these great tzaddikim entered the Mishkan drunk? Indeed, why would they have been drunk at this time?

R' Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter z"l (the Gerrer Rebbe) explains as follows: Nadav and Avihu were not drunk, but they had imbibed some alcohol. They did this because a small amount of alcohol can enhance a person's feelings, and they wanted to enhance their closeness to Hashem on this holy day of the dedication of the Mishkan. They erred, however, for a kohen who serves in the Mishkan before G-d should not enhance his experience with outside influences. Rather, his "spiritual high" and his closeness to Hashem should come from the Divine service itself.

This is what the verse means when it says that they brought the incense with an "alien fire that He had not commanded them." The kohen should be motivated by Hashem's command and nothing else.

R' Ovadiah Sforno comments: Nadav and Avihu reasoned that it was appropriate to bring an incense sacrifice on the inner altar. Even if their logic was correct, they sinned in that "He had not commanded them." (Be'ur Ha'Sforno Al Ha'Torah)

There is an opinion among the Sages that the sin of Nadav and Avihu was that they issued a halachic ruling in the presence of their teacher Moshe. R' Shlomo Kluger z"l writes that this verse confirms that view. How so? Strictly speaking, there was nothing wrong with bringing fire into the Mishkan. And, it is human nature that when one knows that an action is permitted, he does that action without asking a rabbi if he may. Generally, such behaviour is acceptable. However, when one is in close proximity to Hashem, Who is humble, one must be humble as well. Accordingly, it was wrong for Nadav and Avihu to do even that which was obviously permitted without asking Moshe. This is alluded to in the words, "They brought before Hashem a foreign fire." Only because they were in the Mishkan, "before Hashem," was their behaviour wrong. R' Kluger adds: Hashem is different from a human dignitary. When one gives a gift to a human dignitary, the recipient does not care whether the gift is given legally or whether, for example, the gift is stolen goods. Not so Hashem, Who does not accept sacrifices from animals that were stolen. Indeed, Hashem does not accept any mitzvah that is intertwined with a sin.

This is another reason why the verse points out that Nadav and Avihu brought the foreign fire "before Hashem." A human king might have accepted Nadav and Avihu's fire even though they neglected to ask Moshe's permission to sacrifice it. However, Hashem rejected their sacrifice because they did not obtain Moshe's permission. (Source: Imrei Shefer)

בְּקִרְבֵי אֶקְדָּשׁ - I will be sanctified through those who are nearest to Me. (10:3) R' Aharon Kotler z'l writes: This is an illustration of an inadvertent Kiddush Hashem (sanctification of Hashem's Name). Although Nadav and Avihu never intended to sanctify Hashem's Name by dying as they did, nevertheless, Hashem's Name was sanctified when Bnei Yisrael witnessed His judgment at work. And, because Nadav and Avihu played a role in this Kiddush Hashem, even unwittingly, it is mentioned to their credit.

כִּי אֲנִי ה' הַמַּעֲלֶה אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְהִיֵּת לָכֶם לְאֱלֹקִים - For I am Hashem Who elevates you from the land of Egypt to be a G-d unto you (11:45) With this verse, the Torah finishes outlining the laws of kashrut. Indeed, the Midrash states that if one denies the laws of kashrut, he also denies the Exodus. What is the relationship of the Exodus to kashrut? R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai z"l (the Chida) explains: There are two types of impurity that can affect a person - impurity that enters a person and impurity that surrounds a person. An example of the former is non-kosher food; an example of the latter is idolatry. Our sages teach that Hashem hurried Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt because they were about to become inextricably caught up in the impurity of Egypt. The Chida explains that our ancestors had reached the stage where the external impurity of Egypt was about to become an inherent part of their beings. Hashem took Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt before the impurity could penetrate them.

שבת שלום!

Shabbat Shalom!



Shabbat starts 6.12pm



Shabbat ends: 7.16pm

לע"נ ר' מרדכי צבי ב"ר חיאל משה וולפסון ז"ל

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

I would like to dedicate this week's Sedra Insight's sheet to my friend and colleague Rabbi S Harris on the occasion of his recent induction and wish him, Alison and the children many happy and successful years with the community.

Online at: [http://www.wembleysynagogue.org/html/sedra\\_notes.html](http://www.wembleysynagogue.org/html/sedra_notes.html)