

Parshah (Torah Portion) – SHEMINI (Eighth)

4.18.20

Leviticus 9:1 – 11:47; Numbers 19:1-22; 2 Samuel 6:1 – 7:17; Ezekiel 36:16-38; 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

Shemini (Shmini or Sh'mini), which means **eighth**. The name arises from the opening verse:

“On the eighth [shemini] day Moses summoned Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel.” (*Leviticus 9:1*)

Two weeks ago in Parasha Tzav, God instructed Moses to command Aaron and his sons in how to prepare for their duties and rights as kohanim (priests).

For seven days, Aaron and his sons stayed at the Tent of Meeting as part of their ordination process. **On the eighth day, Moses called for them to begin presenting the offerings (קָרְבָּנוֹת, korbanot) to the Lord.**

These offerings were given as a kind of “**welcoming ceremony**” to greet the arrival of God’s **Shekhinah (Glory or Divine Presence)**:

“Then Moses said, ‘This is what the LORD has commanded you to do, so that the glory of the LORD may appear to you.’” (*Leviticus 9:6*)

It took a full seven days of preparation before they could begin this new and holy function as priests who serve Adonai in the Tabernacle, where the Glory of the Lord came to reside.

There is a preparation process that we are called to in order to be welcome habitations for God's holy presence. While our God can choose to dwell anywhere, even within our sinfulness, let us not forget that He is still a holy, mighty, fearsome God.

The Secret Symbolism of the Bull Calf and Goat

When the Israelites finally completed the construction of the Tabernacle after months of tremendous devotion and effort, God's presence would dwell there, as a way to atone for the terrible betrayal and sin of the golden calf. Moses said to Aaron, "Take a bull calf as a sin offering." (Leviticus

But then Moses continues, "Take a he-goat as a sin offering..."

What now? Why a goat? What other *unfinished business* did the people have to attend to before the glory of God would appear to them?

So the meaning of the calf offering is to atone for the sin of the golden calf. But the meaning of the goat is a bit more difficult to discern. To find that answer, we must go back to the book of Genesis where we learn that a goat played a prominent role in the most tragic sin of the family of Israel - the sale of Joseph. After the brothers tore their family to shreds by selling Joseph into servitude in Egypt (a sale which ultimately led the entire family to relocate to Egypt and descend into slavery), instead of showing remorse they used a goat for their cover-up:

And they took Joseph's coat, and they slaughtered a he-goat, and they dipped the coat in the blood. And they sent the fine woolen coat, and they brought [it] to their father, and they said, "We have found this; now recognize whether it is your son's coat or not." He recognized it, and he said, "[It is] my son's coat; a wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn up." (Genesis 37:31-33)

As the people gathered at the Tabernacle waiting for a sign of God's presence, Moses taught them that in order to heal the relationship with their Father, the children must first heal their relationship with each other. He explained that the jealousy and division which led to the sale of Joseph, was, in fact, the precise character trait which led to the division and separation from God at the golden calf, and in order to find harmony with God, it must be eradicated from their midst.

New Beginnings Start with "Eight"

Verse 4 – for today the LORD will appear unto you.

God appears to us in our new beginnings. Can He appear to us in our sinfulness? - Yes! But He brings to us the FULLNESS of His Shekhinah Glory in our repentance, our new beginnings.

While the number seven represents completion (such as God's creation of the universe), the number eight often represents new beginnings:

- On the seventh day, God rested and blessed it, declaring it as a set-apart, holy day of rest. On the eighth day, however, work resumed once more — only this time, human beings began stewardship of God's creation by tending and caring for the Garden of Eden.
- The eighth day is, therefore, a type of anniversary of the Creation.
- Eight souls were saved during the Great Flood.
- The eighth day is considered a day of covenant, for it is on this day that every Jewish male infant is to be brought into covenant with the Almighty God through the rite of circumcision.
- David was the eighth son of Jesse and Israel's first great king from whose lineage the Messiah would come.
- On the eighth day (first day of the week), Jesus rose from the grave and became the firstfruits of all those who will be resurrected on the last day.
- There were eight spices of incense. As well, the High Priest had eight articles of clothing.
- Often the week-long festivals of Passover and Sukkot are given an additional eighth day of celebration, such as Acharon shel Pesach (Final Day of Passover) and Shemini Atzeret (Eighth Day of Assembly) on Sukkot (Tabernacles).

The Eighth Dimension

Many Jewish life-cycle observances are seven-day affairs.

- Two seven-day festivals frame our year—Passover, which runs from the 15th to the 21st of Nissan, and Sukkot, occurring exactly six months later, on Tishrei 15–21.
- A marriage is celebrated for a full week of *sheva berachot* ("seven blessings"), and the death of a loved one is mourned for seven days.
- Our years, too, follow the cycle of creation: six workday years are succeeded by a sabbatical year of Shemittah ("suspension").

- The whole of human history as a seven-millennium week, consisting of 6,000 years of human labor in developing God’s world and a seventh millennium that is “wholly Shabbat and rest, for life everlasting”—the era of our Messiah Jesus.

The cycle consists of two primary phases: **labor and holiness**.

- Six days of labor are followed by a day of spiritual rest
- Six years of working the earth, by a year of suspension and disinvolvement from the material
- Six millennia devoted to struggling with and developing the physical world, by a seventh millennium in which the sole occupation of the entire world will be the knowledge of God.

The Hebrew word for “holy,” *kedushah*, literally means “removed” and “apart.” Its names for the seventh day, Shabbat, and for the seventh year, Shemittah, respectively mean “cessation” and “suspension.” For holiness requires complete disengagement from all material involvements.

- In order to experience the holiness and spirituality of Shabbat, we must cease all material labor
- In order to touch base with the holiness of the land in the Shemittah year, we must suspend all physical work upon its soil and all claims of ownership on its produce
- In order to experience the divine goodness and perfection of our world in the Messianic Age, we must first achieve a state in which there is “no jealousy and no competition” over its material wealth. *Remember Joseph's brothers and the goat?*

Eight represents the introduction of a reality that is beyond all nature and definition, including the definition “transcendence.” This eighth dimension (if we can call it a “dimension”) has no limitations at all: it transcends and pervades, beyond nature yet also fully present within it, equally beyond matter and spirit and equally within them. The Sanctuary, whose role was to make the infinite reality of God an indwelling presence in the physical world, was inaugurated on the eighth day following a seven-day training period.

- Seven Shemittah cycles are followed by a Jubilee year characterized by *liberty* (i.e., freedom from all bounds) rather than just “suspension.”
- The messianic seventh millennium of history will be followed by the supra-historical “world to come”, in which the divine reality will unite with the created reality in ways that we cannot even speculate upon in a world where finite and infinite are mutually exclusive. In the words of Isaiah, the prophet regarding the world to come, ‘**No eye can behold it, O God, save Yours**’ ([Isaiah 64:3](#)).

The Beginning of the Year

Coming into active service in the Tabernacle on the eighth day was not the only indication of new beginnings in this Parasha.

The consecration of Aaron and his sons as priests, as well as the Tabernacle, took place exactly one year after the Exodus from Egypt, in Nisan — the first month.

Nisan is the beginning of spring, when the rainy season comes to an end, the fruit trees begin to blossom, and the fields are carpeted in wildflowers.

The Hebrew word for spring is **aviv**. This word can be divided into two parts: **av**, which means father; and **iv**, which has a numerical representation of 12. Thus, **aviv** (spring) is seen as the father of the twelve months of the year.

Passover, which occurs in this first month of Nisan, is the symbolic “father” of the twelve tribes of Israel as a new nation.

Therefore, the entire Hebrew calendar has a spiritual connection to the formation of the twelve Hebrew tribes, and the service of the priests represents a new beginning for all of Israel.

The Beginning of Wisdom

On the eighth day, the preparations for God’s glorious entry into the Tabernacle were over, and Aaron and his sons began their priestly ministry. (*Leviticus 9:1*)

But something went terribly wrong!

Nadab and Abihu, Aaron’s two eldest sons perished in the blink of an eye — devoured by the consuming fire of God’s wrath. Why? The Torah says they offered “strange fire,” which God had not commanded.

“Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered strange fire [zarah] before the LORD, contrary to His command. So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.” (*Leviticus 10:1–2*)

The Hebrew word **zarah** (זָרָה) carries the connotation of being foreign or another kind.

What was Aaron’s response to such a disturbing family tragedy? Silence. (*Leviticus 10:3*)

There is a well-known saying that “silence is golden” and Aaron's response to this tragedy is perhaps an example of this. At a time of great grief, **Aaron remained silent rather than speak out in angry accusation against God.**

When we go through painful trials in life or when tragedy strikes unexpectedly — whether illness, accident or even death — one of the **best initial strategies may be to keep our mouths closed until we have control over what we will say.**

Solomon, in all of his wisdom, penned the verse: “**Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is considered prudent.**” (*Proverbs 17:28*)

We see this truth with Job’s friends.

After witnessing his terrible situation, they just sat beside him in silence. It is probably the best thing because when they finally opened their mouths to speak, foolish accusations poured forth.

Although it is not clear the exact nature of Nadab and Abihu’s sin, God’s command soon after their death may suggest that they went into the Tent of Meeting in an inebriated state.

Just a few verses later, God tells Aaron, “You and your sons are not to drink wine or other fermented drink whenever you go into the Tent of Meeting, or you will die. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come.” (*Leviticus 10:8–9*)

Although the Bible permits the drinking of wine and alcohol in moderation, it has no place among those in position of spiritual leadership while they are actively serving the Lord. Alcohol can dull one’s senses and prevent a person from distinguishing between right and wrong, clean and unclean — one of the specified functions of the priesthood.

Just as it is unwise to “drink and drive,” it can be equally dangerous in a spiritual sense to “drink and serve the Lord.”

In any event, it is evident that **these sons of Aaron were careless in the face of God’s holiness.**

The Fear of the Lord

Some think that God’s wrath for disregarding His holiness is limited to the Old Testament God of “law and justice.” They think that under the New Testament, **we are “under grace” and, therefore, immune to God’s judgment.**

However, the account of Ananias and Sapphira reveals that **this is a fallacy.**

This New Covenant couple brought an offering to the apostles in Jerusalem, and lied to the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) about how much money they received for the sale of their property.

“Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet.” (*Acts 5:1–2*)

For lying to God, both Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead. (*Acts 5:4–11*)

Although God is merciful, patient, compassionate, and slow to anger, we must not take these qualities for granted, nor test the Lord our God by treating His holiness carelessly.

God is equally just and holy. For this reason He is called a “Consuming Fire” throughout the both the Old and New Testaments.

May we all walk in a healthy fear of the Lord, which will keep us on the narrow road that leads to life.

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” (*Proverbs 9:10*)

The Paradox of Eight

The number eight represents a power that is greater than nature. When we encounter the number eight in Scripture, it is alerting us that the topic we are discussing is one that transcends the natural expectation. It is the power of infinity.

During each of the seven days, the Tabernacle was erected and sacrifices were offered. Yet, throughout the seven days of inauguration, there was no sign of God's Shekhinah. For it is beyond the natural ability of a human being to draw down a Divine revelation into this world of the natural where the spiritual is often concealed.

Remember what the False Prophet will be able to do in the last days - call down fire from heaven! And hence, why so many will be deceived into following what he says to do and believe. Hmmm....

The number eight is a direct continuation of the number seven. It signifies the more-than-human; it is the symbol of **holiness**.

While the God's glory cannot be drawn down by any human being and can only be gifted to us by God Himself, God chooses to reveal the power of his glory in the symbol of the number eight only after people invest themselves in achieving the number seven. Thus, only after the people celebrated the seven days of inauguration, representing the culmination of human achievement, did God reveal the eighth dimension—that which transcends nature and could be expressed by the will of God alone.

There are times when we are called upon to accomplish feats that we may think are beyond our natural capacity. When we do all that is within our capacity, when we commit to the full “seven days of inauguration,” then we are assured that on “the eighth day,” God will bless our efforts with His infinite ability.

Our efforts to consecrate the world during the seven days of human time are the **gestures of faithfulness** which will produce the Divine response of the eighth day. So although the age to come will be of an altogether higher level of holiness than we can evoke with our service to the Lord in the present, it will be the outcome of what we do now.

Jesus commanded to "Go, make disciples". He informed the apostles that the end will come when the Gospel has been preached to the whole world. There is a seven-day effort on our part in order to bring about the eighth day.

It will be the "eighth day" in the sense that it continues and completes the perfection after which we now strive, after we have done all of which we are capable.

The same is true about the revelation within the Sanctuary on the eighth day. Although it was not earned by the human activity of consecration on the previous seven days, it was only when this consecration was completed that the Divine response came. **God gives His gift to man only after man has done all within his power to consecrate himself to God.**

The Eighth Day Promise & The New Covenant

⁸ The person who burned up the heifer is to wash his clothes and himself in water, but he will remain unclean until evening. ⁹ A man who is clean is to collect the ashes of the heifer and store them outside the camp in a clean place. They are to be kept for the community of the people of Isra'el to prepare water for purification from sin. ¹⁰ The one who collected the ashes of the heifer is to wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. For the people of Isra'el and for the foreigner staying with them this will be a permanent regulation. (*Numbers 19:8-10*)

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. (Hebrews 9:14)

²² “Therefore tell the house of Isra’el that *Adonai Elohim* says this: ‘I am not going to do this for your sake, house of Isra’el, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have been profaning among the nations where you went. (Ezekiel 36:22)

25

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you,
and you will be clean;
I will cleanse you from all your uncleanness
and from all your idols.

26

**I will give you a new heart
and put a new spirit inside you;**
I will take the stony heart out of your flesh
and give you a heart of flesh.

27

**I will put my Spirit inside you
and cause you to live by my laws,
respect my rulings and obey them.**

28

You will live in the land I gave to your ancestors.
You will be my people,
and I will be your God.

29

I will save you from all your uncleanness.
I will summon the grain and increase it,
and not send famine against you.
(Ezekiel 36:25-29)

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

¹⁶ For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (2 Corinthians 6:16)

We are now the temple of the living God. So how much more should we cleanse our hearts, minds, spirits and bodies...???

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing **holiness to completion in the fear of God.** (2 Corinthians 7:1)

This is our effort of consecration, within our human capacity, our seven-day preparation. And then our great God in His infinite ability brings the eighth day of promise...

³³“*Adonai Elohim* says, ‘When the day comes for me to cleanse you from all your guilt, I will cause the cities to be inhabited and the ruins to be rebuilt. ³⁶ Then the nations around you that remain will know that **I, *Adonai*, have rebuilt the ruins and replanted what was abandoned. I, *Adonai*, have spoken; and I will do it.’**
(*Ezekiel 36:33, 36*)