



Shabbat Table Talk Page

Overview

- **Parashah: Shemini (שְׁמִינִי, "Eighth")**
- **Chapters: Leviticus 9:1-11:47**



בְּרִידָה אֶתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לַעֲסֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה

– Torah Study Blessing –

Synopsis

This week's Torah portion continues from our last Torah reading (i.e., Tzav) where the seven-day inauguration ceremony for the Tabernacle and the priests was described. During each of the "seven days of consecration" (beginning on Adar 23) Moses essentially served as the first High Priest of Israel by offering sacrifices and training the new priests. On the eighth day, however, (i.e., Nisan 1), God commissioned Aaron and his sons to officially begin their new responsibilities as Israel's priests. The portion first describes the ceremonies performed to consecrate the altar. Now instead of Moses functioning as the High Priest, Aaron brought various offerings, including sin offerings and whole burnt offerings both for himself and for the elders of Israel. Aaron and his sons then offered additional sacrifices on behalf of the people as well.

After completing the sequence of offerings, Aaron blessed the people with *Birkat Kohanim* (i.e., the priestly blessing). However, the Glory of the LORD did not appear, and there was no Divine Fire (*Shekhinah*) that consumed the sacrifices. This was an anxious moment for the people, since it was unclear whether the LORD had accepted Aaron's offerings and therefore had forgiven Israel for the sin of the Golden Calf. Moses and Aaron then went into the Holy Place of the Mishkan and interceded, and after they came out to bless the people again, the Glory of the LORD appeared and the holy fire (in the form of a lion) consumed the offerings on the altar. When all the people saw it, they rejoiced and shouted and fell on their faces.

The portion continues with the tragic death of Aaron's two oldest sons, Nadab and Abihu, who died when they offered "strange fire" in the Tabernacle. Aaron remained silent as his sons' bodies were removed by his cousins, and Moses warned Aaron's two remaining sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, not to mourn during this sacred occasion. Moses then repeated the instructions that the priests were required to eat their portion of the sacrifices within the Holy Place.

The portion ends with a list of which animals, birds, fish and insects are permitted or forbidden as food, which subsequently provided the framework for Jewish dietary law (i.e., kosher law). The Israelites were permitted to eat any mammal that has *both* a split hoof and chews its cud (Lev. 11:3). Likewise, only fish that have *both* scales and fins were to be regarded as kosher. A list of acceptable (i.e., non-predatory) birds was given, along with the commandment not to eat any insects unless they have a pair of jointed legs used for leaping. The dietary laws were intended to sanctify the Israelites by separating them for holiness: "For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy."



Basic Questions

1. Who was the first High Priest of Israel? ¹
2. On what date did Aaron and his sons begin to serve as Israel's priests? ²
3. What was Aaron required to sacrifice before he served as High Priest? ³
4. What were the people required to offer in sacrifice? ⁴
5. What was the reason for these sacrifices? ⁵
6. After Aaron made the offerings for the people, what did he do? ⁶
7. According to Jewish tradition, why did Moses and Aaron go into the Holy Place of the Tabernacle just after Aaron blessed the people? ⁷
8. How was the Glory of the LORD first revealed at the Tabernacle? ⁸
9. What were the names of the two sons of Aaron that were killed by the LORD? ⁹
10. Why were Aaron's sons killed? ¹⁰
11. What did Moses say to Aaron regarding the death of his sons? ¹¹
12. Two of Aaron's cousins were told to carry the bodies outside of the camp. Why didn't their surviving brothers carry them out? ¹²

¹ Moses, since he taught the people about the Passover and offered sacrifices at Sinai during the ratification of the covenant. Moses also received the vision of the Mishkan and the kehunah (priesthood) directly from God at Sinai, and he was the one who personally trained Aaron and his sons regarding the laws of sacrifice. He also instructed the rest of the Levites about their responsibilities regarding the care and maintenance of the Tabernacle.

² On Nisan 1, or Rosh Chodashim, the anniversary of the month of redemption. It is called the "day took ten crowns" in the Talmud (Shabbat 87b), since it marked the first day of the Creation (i.e., a Sunday), the first day of the first month, the first day for the priesthood, the first day for the offerings of the leaders of Israel, the first day for public sacrifice, the first day for the fall of fire from Heaven, the first day for the eating of sacred food, the first day for the dwelling of the Divine Presence among Israel, the first day for the priestly blessing of Israel, the first day on which it was forbidden to sacrifice to God anywhere except at the Sanctuary.

³ A defect-free bull calf (egel) for a sin offering (chatat) and a ram for a whole burnt offering (olah).

⁴ A male goat for a sin offering; a calf and a lamb for burnt offerings; and an ox and a ram for peace offerings. In addition, a minchah (grain) offering mixed with oil (Lev. 9:3-4).

⁵ First to make atonement (kapparah) for Aaron and the people; secondly, so that *kevod HaShem* - the Glory of the LORD - would be manifest at the Tabernacle (Lev. 9:6).

⁶ He blessed them: "The LORD bless you and keep you..." (Lev. 9:22).

⁷ They went to pray together, since even after offering the sacrifices the Glory of God did not appear (Lev. 9:23).

⁸ Fire that came out from the Holy of Holies that immediately consumed the offerings upon the altar (Lev. 9:24).

⁹ Nadab and Abihu, the two oldest sons of Aaron (Eleazar and Ithamar were his other two sons).

¹⁰ They offered "strange fire" in the Tabernacle, which either means an unauthorized sacrifice of some kind, or they offered sacrifice while they were intoxicated. The same fire that consumed the sacrifices consumed them. "Each took their own censor" means that each one acted without taking counsel from one another.

¹¹ He told Aaron that the LORD had warned that those near to Him (i.e., the priests) would be held to a higher standard of holiness, which implied that they were subject to immediate judgment for their sins. This was intended to set apart the priests as examples for the people and to bring glory to God's Name (Lev 10:3). Interestingly, there is no record in the written Torah of this statement from the LORD.

¹² Because the priests would be ritually defiled by touching the dead bodies.



13. Why did Moses get angry at Aaron's sons? ¹³
14. What was Aaron's response to Moses about not eating the offering? ¹⁴
15. What are the two signs of a kosher animal? Provide some examples. ¹⁵
16. What are two signs of a kosher fish? ¹⁶
17. What does the Torah say about eating birds? ¹⁷
18. What does *shechitah* (שחיטה) mean? ¹⁸
19. According to the rabbis, what are the three basic categories of kosher food? ¹⁹
20. What does the word *treif* mean? ²⁰
21. Did Paul eat pork? ²¹
22. Did Yeshua keep kosher? ²²

Discussion Topics

1. Whenever we eat food, we incorporate other life as a means of nourishment for our own, and therefore eating is necessarily a *sacrificial* act. In traditional Judaism, the dinner table is regarded as an altar before God, the honored guest. Discuss the connection between holiness and eating in your own life and family traditions...
2. Many kosher laws are regarded as "chukkim," or laws for which God gave no rational explanation. They are to be obeyed from a sense of trust and loyalty, not because they "make sense" to us... Nonetheless, some people have attempted to discover reasons for these laws. For instance, some have said they were intended to promote hygiene or biological cleanliness in the camp. Others have said that they were designed to sensitize our hearts. If we must take away life in order to sustain our own, we should be conscious of the sacrifice and humane in the way we do it...

¹³ Because they did not eat the sin offering in the place of the sanctuary as commanded (or apply its blood to the golden altar). Moses was perhaps afraid they would be killed as were Nadab and Abihu for this transgression.

¹⁴ He said his sons already had eaten the sin offering and the whole burnt offering – despite being in a state of mourning – but they refused to eat the daily sin offering that was offered afterward (Lev. 10:17-19).

¹⁵ It chews its cud and has split hooves. Cattle, deer, goats, sheep, gazelle, antelope, are all kosher.

¹⁶ It has both fins and scales.

¹⁷ Predator birds are listed as unclean and not to be eaten.

¹⁸ Ritual slaughtering of a kosher animal or bird. (Fish are not considered meat and therefore are not slaughtered)

¹⁹ Meat, dairy, and "parve" (neither meat nor dairy, which can be eaten with either). One of the kosher basics is the total separation of meat and dairy products (Ex. 23:19), which creates a lot of headaches (i.e., keeping a kosher kitchen), and which Abraham certainly disregarded when he served meat and milk to the angels (see Gen. 18:18).

²⁰ Food that is not in accordance with Jewish dietary law.

²¹ Highly unlikely...

²² Undoubtedly – but not in the "rabbinical" sense. During Peter's vision of the unclean animals he stated that he had "never eaten anything unclean before," and this included his time spent with Yeshua (Acts 10:9-16).



Others have said that the laws were intended to keep us from becoming “mindless eaters” who indiscriminately consume food. Still others have said certain food types were permitted by God because of inherent properties associated with that life form. For instance, kosher mammals and birds are non-predators and their consumption is intended to remind us of our need to be peace loving and community directed. Discuss your own ideas of “clean” and “unclean” food and compare this to the Torah’s basic framework of kosher laws.

3. Why was Aaron forbidden to grieve the death of his sons?
4. A proverb says “Anger blinds the eye.” Moses’ anger led him astray several times in his life. In our Torah portion this week, Moses’ anger blinded him to compassion for his brother. Discuss the nature of anger. Is it always bad or can it be sanctified for good? (Eph. 4:26)
5. The inauguration of the Tabernacle certainly had an inauspicious beginning. Aaron’s first day as High Priest of Israel turned tragic as his sons died by fire from heaven. Is there a prophetic message in all of this, especially in light of the gospel of Yeshua and His greater priesthood?
6. Discuss the death of Nadab and Abihu. What does this narrative teach us about God? Think about the idea of “strange fire.” Why were Nadab and Abihu given the death penalty for offering incense in the Tabernacle? Doesn’t that seem a bit *extreme*? God’s judgment has prompted some to suggest a *subtext* to the narrative. For example, maybe Aaron’s sons acted presumptuously because they did not confer with Moses or Aaron before making the offering (thereby disrespecting Moses’ authority). Or perhaps they secretly desired to assume the leadership of Israel after the death of Moses and Aaron, and God exposed the intent of their heart? Or maybe they were careless in their service because they were intoxicated (but where did they get the wine?). Or maybe they used “profane” fire to burn the incense when God intended to reveal His glory by means of the supernatural “heavenly fire,” and their meddling somehow diminished God’s “presentation” before Israel.... Or perhaps they died because of their bad theology. Did they think the incense would “counteract” the fire of God’s judgment, and thereby implicitly divided God’s essence into *Elohim* (Judgment) and *YHVH* (Compassion)? If so, they were acting as if God were dualistic, and God needed to immediately correct this assumption... Or was God perhaps avenging Aaron for his perfidious sin of making the Golden Calf? Or was the “strange fire” really an inordinate zeal that took Nadab and Abihu “out of bounds” with God? Was the Torah warning us against ecstatic worship? Many such questions can be raised.... Discuss some of the options.
7. Do you think that followers of Yeshua should regard the dietary guidelines revealed in the Torah, or do you regard them as “obsolete” because of the teaching of the New Testament? When Yeshua said “It’s not what goes into your mouth, but what comes out of your mouth that matters” (Matt. 15:11), do you think he was teaching His followers that we should ignore the dietary laws of the Torah? If so, how do you explain Peter’s aversion to eat anything unclean? After all, Peter had spent nearly three years with Yeshua but still apparently practiced dietary law. If Yeshua taught his followers that no foods were to be regarded as “clean” or “unclean,” then how are we to understand Peter’s reaction during his vision in Acts 10:9-16?



8. Why were the food laws placed immediately after the narrative of the first day of the Tabernacle? Is this simply coincidental, or is there a connection to be made here? If so, what sort of connection? For instance, some of the sages have said that the consumption of unclean food “damages” the soul, whereas others have said the kosher laws were intended to teach us that God sets the “menu” as He deems best for us. What are your thoughts?
9. Many Hebrew words share the root for “holy” (קדש). Here are a few:
- Kiddush – sanctification of time during a holiday
 - Kaddish – Prayer in memory of the dead
 - Kedushah – Sanctification (e.g., kiddeshanu – “who sanctifies us with mitzvot...”)
 - Mikdash – Sanctuary
 - Kedushin – Betrothal

Likewise, many Hebrew Names for God include the root (קדש), including:

- Kedosh Israel – Name for God (“The Holy One of Israel”)
- HaKadosh – The Holy One
- Ruach HaKadosh – The Holy Spirit

Discuss the idea of holiness and the repeated imperative to “separate” or “distinguish” between the holy and the profane. How does *kedushat ha-chayim* (“holiness of life”) show up in your practical life?

שַׁבַּת שְׁלוֹמִים
S h a b b a t S h a l o m !

For Next Week:

- Read parashat **Tazria** (i.e., Leviticus 12:1-13:59)
- Read the Haftarah (2 Kings 4:42-5:19)
- Read the New Testament (John 6:8-13; Matt. 8:1-4)

