

# Shemini

## Leviticus 9:1-11:47

Ceaser



On the eighth day following "seven days of inauguration," Aaron and his sons begin to officiate as Kohanim (priests); a fire issues forth from G-d to consume the offerings on the Altar and the Divine Presence comes to dwell in the Sanctuary.

Aaron's two elder sons, Nadav and Avihu, offer a "strange fire before G-d, which He commanded them not" and die before G-d. Aaron is silent in face of his tragedy. Moses and Aaron subsequently disagree as to a point of law regarding the offerings, but Moses concedes to Aaron that Aaron is in the right.

G-d commands the kosher laws, identifying the animal species permissible and forbidden for consumption. Land animals may be eaten only if they have split hooves and also chew their cud; fish must have fins and scales; a list of non-kosher birds is given, and a list of kosher insects (four types of locusts).

Also in Shemini are some of the laws of ritual purity, including the purifying power of the mikvah (a pool of water meeting specified qualifications) and the wellspring. Thus the people of Israel are enjoined to "differentiate between the impure and the pure."

**"And it came to pass on the eighth day..."**

**Last week's Parshah, Tzav, told of the "seven days of inauguration" during which the Sanctuary was consecrated and Aaron and his sons were trained for the priesthood. This week's reading, Shemini ("eighth"), begins by recounting the events of the eighth day - which was the 1st of Nisan of the year 2449 from Creation (1312 bce), two weeks before the first anniversary of the Exodus.**

**And it came to pass on the eighth day, that Moses called Aaron and his sons, and the elders of Israel.**

**And he said to Aaron: "Take you a young calf for a sin offering, and a ram for an ascent offering, without blemish, and offer them before G-d.**

**"And to the children of Israel you shall speak, saying: Take a kid of the goats for a sin offering; and a calf and a lamb, both of the first year, without blemish, for a burnt offering; also a bullock and a ram for peace offerings, to sacrifice before G-d; and a meal offering mingled with oil;**

**"For today G-d will appear to you..."**

**The offerings are brought as instructed, following which,**

**Moses and Aaron went into the Tent of Meeting, and came out, and blessed the people: and the glory of G-d appeared to all the people.**

**And there came a fire out from before G-d, and consumed the ascent offering and the fat [of the other offerings] upon the Altar. And all the people saw, and sang out, and fell on their faces.**

***And it came to pass on the eighth day (Leviticus 9:1)***

***That day took ten crowns: It was the first day of the Creation (i.e., a Sunday), the first for the offerings of the nessi'im (tribal heads), the first for the priesthood, the first for [public] sacrifice, the first for the fall of fire from Heaven, the first for the eating of sacred food, the first for the dwelling of the Divine Presence in Israel, the first for the priestly blessing of Israel, the first day on which it was forbidden to sacrifice to G-d anywhere save in the Sanctuary, and the first of months.***

***(Talmud, Shabbat 87b)***

***That day was as joyous to G-d as the day on which heaven and earth were created.***

***(Talmud, Megillah 10b)***

***And it came to pass on the eighth day (9:1)***

***The number seven represents the cycle of creation; the number eight represents the "circumference"--that which lies beyond the perimeter of time and space. This is why the Divine Presence came to dwell in the Israelite camp on the eighth day. This is also alluded to in the saying of our sages (Talmud, Erchin 13b) that "The lyre of Moshiach has eight strings."***

***(Keli Yakar; Shaloh)***

***And it came to pass on the eighth day... And he said to Aaron (9:1)***

***For seven days, G-d persuaded Moses at the burning bush to go on His mission to Egypt, as Moses refused... Said G-d to Moses: "By your life, I shall tie this in your skirts." When did He repay him? ... All the seven days of inauguration Moses ministered in the office of High Priest, and he imagined it was his. On the seventh day G-d said to him: "It belongs not to you but to your brother Aaron..."***

***(Midrash Rabbah)***

***And Moses said: "This is the thing which G-d commanded you to do; and the glory of G-d shall appear to you" (9:6)***

***For the seven days of inauguration, during which Moses set up the Sanctuary, performed the service in it, and dismantled it each day, the Divine Presence did not rest in it. The people of Israel were humiliated, and said to Moses: "Moses our teacher! All the toil that we toiled was only that the Divine Presence should dwell amongst us and we should know the sin of the Calf was forgiven us!" Said Moses to them: "Aaron my brother is more worthy than I--through his offerings and his service the Divine Presence will rest upon you, and you will know that G-d has chosen you."***

***(Rashi)***

## **Strange Fire**

**And then, in the midst of the jubilation, tragedy struck.**

**Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aaron, took each of them his censer, and put fire in it, and put incense on it, and offered strange fire before G-d, which He commanded them not.**

**A fire went out from G-d, and consumed them, and they died before G-d.**

**And Moses said to Aaron: "This is it that which G-d spoke, saying: I will be sanctified in those who are close to Me, and before all the people I will be glorified." And Aaron was silent.**

**And Moses called Mishael and Elzafan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them: "Come near, carry your brothers from before the Sanctuary out of the camp." So they went near, and carried them in their robes out of the camp; as Moses had said.**

**Because of the centrality of their role in the revelation of the Divine Presence in the Sanctuary that day, Aaron and his two remaining sons are forbidden to engage in any of the customary mourning practices:**

**And Moses said to Aaron, and to Elazar and to Itamar, his sons:**

**"Let not the hair of your heads grow long, neither rend your clothes; lest you die, and lest anger come upon all the people. Your brethren, the whole house of Israel, shall bewail the conflagration which G-d has burned..."**

**And they did according to the word of Moses.**

**And Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aaron, took each of them his censer... And they died before G-d (10:1-2)**

**Bar Kappara said in the name of Rabbi Jeremiah ben Elazar: Aaron's sons died on account of four things: for drawing near, for offering, for the strange fire, and for not having taken counsel from each other. "For drawing near"--because they entered into the innermost precincts of the Sanctuary. "For offering"--because they offered a sacrifice which they had not been commanded to offer. "For the strange fire"--they brought in fire from the kitchen. "And for not having taken counsel from each other"--as it says, "Each of them his censer," implying that they acted each on his own initiative, not taking counsel from one another.**

**Rabbi Mani of She'ab, Rabbi Joshua of Siknin, and Rabbi Yochanan in the name of Rabbi Levi said: The sons of Aaron died on account of four things... Because they had drunk wine, as it says [immediately following the incident], "Drink no wine nor strong drink... that you die not" (Leviticus 10:9). Because they served in the Sanctuary lacking the prescribed number of priestly garments (cf. Exodus 28:43). Because they entered the Sanctuary without washing their hands and feet (cf. Exodus 30:21). Because they had no children... as it says, "And Nadav and Avihu died... and they had no children" (Numbers 3:4).**

**Abba Hanin says it was because they had no wives, for it is written [regarding the High Priest], "And [he shall] make atonement for himself, and for his house" (Leviticus 16:6)--"his house" refers to his wife.**

**Rabbi Levi says that they were arrogant. Many women remained unmarried waiting for them. What did they say? Our father's brother is a king, our mother's brother is a prince [i.e., Nachshon, the head of the tribe of Judah], our father is a High Priest, and we are both Deputy High Priests; what woman is worthy of us? ... Moses and Aaron went first, Nadav and Avihu walked behind them, and all Israel followed, and Nadav and Avihu were saying: "When will these two old men die and we assume authority over the community?" Rabbi Judah in the name of Rabbi Aibu said that they uttered this to one another with their mouths, while Rabbi Pinchas said that they harbored the thought in their hearts.**

**Others say: They already deserved to die at Mount Sinai, when they callously feasted their eyes on the Divine (Exodus 24:9-11).**

**(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)**

***Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov stated: The sons of Aaron died only because they gave a legal decision in the presence of their master Moses. What was the exposition they made? They interpreted the verse (Leviticus 1:7), "And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire upon the altar." This is to teach us, they said, that although fire came down from heaven, it is nevertheless a mitzvah to bring also ordinary fire. (This is indeed the law; their sin was that they rendered a Halachic decision in the presence of their teacher.)***

***(Talmud, Eruvin 63a; Rashi)***

***Nadav and Avihu died because of Aaron's making of the Golden Calf, as it is written: "And against Aaron did G-d verily rage to destroy him; and I prayed also for Aaron at that time" (Deuteronomy 9:20). "To destroy him" means the death of children, as it is written, "And I destroyed his fruit from above" (Amos 2:9). Moses' prayer was halfway effective, so that two died and two remained alive.***

***(Rashi on Deuteronomy 9:20)***

***"They came close to G-d and died" (Leviticus 16:1)--they approached the supernal light out of their great love of the Holy, and thereby died. Thus they died by "divine kiss" such as experienced by the perfectly righteous; it is only that the righteous die when the divine kiss approaches them, while they died by their approaching it... Although they sensed their own demise, this did not prevent them from drawing near to G-d in attachment, delight, delectability, fellowship, love, kiss and sweetness, to the point that their souls ceased from them.***

***(Ohr HaChaim)***

***And a fire went out from G-d and consumed them (10:2)***

***But subsequently it says that Moses instructed Mishael and Eltzafan "Carry your brothers from before the Sanctuary" and that "They carried them out in their robes"? ... G-d sent forth two threads of fire into each one's nostrils and consumed their souls, without touching their flesh and without touching their clothes.***

***(Midrash Tanchuma)***

***And Moses said to Aaron: "This is it that which G-d spoke, saying: I will be sanctified in those who are close to Me..." (10:3)***

***This was said to Moses at Sinai, but its meaning was not known to him until the occurrence happened, when Moses said to Aaron: "My brother, at Sinai, G-d said to me: 'I will sanctify this House, and through a great man would I sanctify it,' and I thought that either through me or through you would this House be sanctified; but now I see that your two sons are greater than you or I."***

***(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)***

***And Aaron was silent (10:3)***

***Because Aaron was silent, he was rewarded that G-d spoke exclusively to him (see below, verses 8-11; ordinarily G-d spoke to Aaron only in conjunction with--or through--Moses).***

***(Midrash Rabbah)***

***Said Rav Papa: The merit of attending a house of mourning lies in the silence observed.***

***(Talmud, Berachot 6b)***

***In youth, one learns to talk; in maturity, one learns to be silent. This is man's problem: that he learns to talk before he learns to be silent.***

***(Rabbi Nachman of Breslav)***

***Speech signifies comprehensibility. Melody is beyond language, expressing moods which words cannot describe. Silence is yet higher.***

***The power to be silent at certain moments of life and of history is an important strength. It expresses the awareness that G-d is infinite, and cannot be encapsulated in our human conceptions of what should take place.***

***The Talmud tells of an instance in which Moses himself was told by G-d to be silent. G-d showed him in a vision all future generations of the Jewish people, and the leaders of each generation. Moses was greatly impressed by the wisdom of Rabbi Akiva. Then he saw the way the Romans tortured him to death. "Is this the reward of his Torah knowledge?" Moses asked. G-d answered: "Be silent. Thus it arose in My thought".***

***This is not to say that the Torah advocates a fatalistic approach to life. Before the event, one must do everything possible to prevent tragedy. But once it has happened, G-d forbid, through the acceptance and the silence we reach a special closeness to the Divine. Our Sages tell us that because Aaron was silent, he was rewarded by G-d speaking directly to him.***

***In our generation, too, there is a need for this power of silence. It is not a passive power, but one that leads to vigorous and joyous action. The Jewish response to the harrowing events of the Shoah is the determined and energetic action to rebuild Jewish family life and Jewish knowledge.***

***Through our power of silence we too, like Aaron, will merit Divine revelation. G-d will bring the Messiah, rebuilding the Temple and bringing lasting peace to the world.***

***(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)***

***Do not drink wine or strong drink... when you enter the Tent of Meeting (10:9)***

***Though the vine be supported by straight reeds and forked reeds, these cannot stand up under the weight of the wine in the grapes. So if wine's own mother cannot bear its burden, how then can you?***

***(Midrash Rabbah)***

***And that you differentiate between holy and the profane... and that you instruct the children of Israel (10:10-11)***

***This teaches us that one who has drunk wine is forbidden to render a ruling of Torah law.***

***(Rashi)***

### **G-d Speaks to Aaron**

**And G-d spoke to Aaron, saying:**

**"Do not drink wine or strong drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you enter the Tent of Meeting, lest you die; it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations.**

**"And that you differentiate between holy and the profane, and between the impure and the pure. And that you instruct the children of Israel all the statutes which G-d has spoken to them by the hand of Moses."**

### **The Disagreement**

**Moses instructs Aaron, Elazar and Itamar to eat the special offerings of the day, as prescribed (despite the fact that, ordinarily, a priest in mourning does not partake of the offerings). This they do, except in the case of one offering:**

**And Moses diligently sought the goat of the sin offering, and, behold, it was burnt; and he was angry with Elazar and Itamar, the sons of Aaron that were left alive, saying:**

**"Why have you not eaten the sin offering in the holy place, seeing it is most holy... you should indeed have eaten it in the holy place, as I commanded."**

**And Aaron replied to Moses: "Behold, this day have they offered their sin offering and their ascent offering before G-d; and such things have befallen me. If I had eaten the sin offering today, would it have been accepted in the sight of G-d?"**

**And Moses heard this, and it was favorable in his eyes.**

***And Moses diligently sought the goat of the sin offering, and, behold, it was burnt... (10:16)***

***Three goats were brought that day as sin-offerings: (1) the one that G-d commanded should be offered by Aaron on the occasion of the Eighth Day; (2) the one brought by Nachshon, leader of the tribe of Judah, as the first in the series of offerings brought by the tribal heads in honor of the Sanctuary's inauguration; (3) the goat offered every Rosh Chodesh (first of the month--that day was the first of Nissan).***

***The first two were not burnt, but eaten by Aaron and his sons as per Moses' instructions. The Rosh Chodesh offering, however, Aaron burned, reasoning that if he was instructed to eat the meat of the day's special offerings even though he is in mourning (contrary to the usual law), he should not deduce that the same applies to an offering that is not unique to this special occasion, but is part of the regularly scheduled offerings.***

***This distinction escaped Moses, who demanded of Aaron and his sons: Why did you burn this sin-offering? And if you burned it because you are mourners, why did you eat the others? To which Aaron replied: "If you heard this instruction (that the offerings should be eaten even by mourners) regarding the offerings of the moment, you should not apply the same to the offerings for all times."***

***(Talmud, Zevachim; Rashi)***

***And [Moses] was angry (10:16)***

***Because he became angry, he forgot the law that a mourner is forbidden to eat from the meat of the offerings.***

***(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)***

***And he was angry with Elazar and Itamar (10:16)***

***In deference to Aaron's honor he directed his anger to Elazar and Itamar.  
(Rashi)***

***And Aaron replied to Moses (10:19)***

***If Moses spoke angrily to Elazar and Itamar, why did Aaron reply? This tells us that Moses spoke to them only in deference to Aaron. Thus they said: it is not appropriate that our father sits silently and we reply, nor is it appropriate that a student should correct his teacher. Perhaps it was because Elazar knew not how to answer? But the verse (Numbers 31:21) attests that, when he desired, he spoke in the presence of Moses and the tribal leaders.***

***(Rashi)***

***And Moses heard this, and it was favorable in his eyes (10:20)***

***Moses was not ashamed to admit his error; he did not say "I did not hear this," but said, "I heard it and I forgot it."***

***(Talmud; Rashi)***

***He issued a proclamation to all the camp, saying: "I made an error in regard to the law, and Aaron my brother came and taught it me."***

***(Midrash Rabbah)***

***There are seven things that characterize a boor, and seven that characterize a wise man. A wise man does not speak before one who is greater than him in wisdom or age. He does not interrupt his fellow's words. He does not hasten to answer. His questions are on the subject and his answers to the point. He responds to first things first and to latter things later. Concerning what he did not hear, he says "I did not hear." He concedes to the truth. With the boor, the reverse of all these is the case.***

***"He does not interrupt his fellow's words"--this is Aaron, who though he had an answer to Moses' charge, waited in silence until Moses had concluded speaking. "He concedes to the truth"--this is Moses, who admitted that Aaron was in the right.***

***(Ethics of the Fathers; Avot d'Rabbi Natan)***

## **The Dietary Laws**

**"These are the animals which you may eat," G-d tells Moses to instruct the people of Israel, "among all the beasts that are upon the earth: Whatever parts the hoof and is cloven footed, and chews the cud."**

**To be fit to eat, an animal must have both identifying signs; the Torah cites four examples of animals that have but one, and are thus "unclean":**

**The camel... the hyrax... and the hare, because he chews the cud but does not part the hoof, is unclean to you.**

**And the swine, though he divide the hoof and be cloven footed, yet he chews not the cud; he is unclean to you. Of their flesh shall you not eat, and their carcass shall you not touch; they are unclean to you.**

**Water creatures may be eaten if they have both fins and scales (thereby excluding all forms of "seafood" other than the kosher species of fish).**

**Regarding birds, the Torah does not provide "signs," but instead lists twenty species of non-kosher fowl:**

**And these are they which you shall have in abomination among the birds; they shall not be eaten, they are abominable:**

**The eagle, and the bearded vulture and the black vulture. The kite, and the buzzard after its kind. Every raven after its kind. The owl, the kestrel, and the gull; and the sparrow hawk after its kind. The little owl, the fish fowl, and the great owl. The barn owl, the jackdaw, and the gier eagle. The stork, the heron after her kind; the hoopoe, and the bat.**

**Insects, as a rule, are forbidden--"All swarming things that fly, going upon four, shall be an abomination to you"--with four exceptions:**

**These of them you may eat: the locust after its kind, and the grasshopper after its kind, and the hargol after its kind, and the hagav after its kind.**

**The great Kabbalist, Rabbi Isaac Luria, taught that every created thing possesses a "spark" of divine energy that constitutes its essence and soul. When a person utilizes something toward a G-dly end, he brings to light this divine spark, manifesting and realizing the purpose for which it was created. In all physical substances, a material "husk" (kelipah) encases and conceals the divine spark at its core, necessitating great effort on the part of man to access the spark without becoming enmeshed in the surface materiality.**

**No existence is devoid of a divine spark--indeed, nothing can exist without the pinpoint of G-dliness that imbues it with being and purpose. But not every spark can be actualized. There are certain "impregnable" elements whose sparks are inaccessible to us. The fact that something is forbidden by the Torah means that its husk cannot be penetrated, so that its spark remains locked within it and cannot be elevated.**

**Thus, one who eats a piece of kosher meat and then uses the energy gained from it to perform a mitzvah, thereby elevates the spark of divinity that is the essence of the meat, freeing it of its mundane incarnation and raising it to a state of fulfilled spirituality. However, if one would do the same with a piece of non-kosher meat, no such "elevation" would take place. Even if he applied the energy to positive and G-dly ends, this would not constitute a realization of the divine purpose in the meats creation, since the consumption of the meat was an express violation of the divine will.**

**This is the deeper significance of the Hebrew terms assur and mutar employed by Torah law for the forbidden and the permissible. Assur, commonly translated as "forbidden," literally means "bound", implying that these are things whose sparks the Torah has deemed bound and imprisoned in a shell of negativity and proscription. Mutar ("permitted"), which literally means "unbound," is the term for those sparks which the Torah has empowered us to extricate from their mundane embodiment and actively involve in our positive endeavors.**

**The "bound" elements of creation also have a role in the realization of the divine purpose outlined by the Torah. But theirs is a "negative" role they exist so that we should achieve a conquest of self by resisting them. There is no Torah-authorized way in which they can actively be involved in our development of creation, no way in which they may themselves become part of the "dwelling for G-d" that we are charged to make of our world. Of these elements it is said, "Their breaking is their rectification." They exist to be rejected and defeated, and it is in their defeat and exclusion from our lives that their raison d'etre is realized.**

**(The Chassidic Masters)**

***These are the animals which you may eat... (11:2)***

***The birds and many of the mammals forbidden by the Torah are predators, while the permitted animals are not. We are commanded not to eat those animals possessive of a cruel nature, so that we should not absorb these qualities into ourselves.***

***(Nachmanides)***

***These are the animals which you shall eat among all the beasts that are upon the earth... of all that are in the waters... among the birds... (11:2, 9, 13)***

***Land animals, which were created from the soil, are rendered fit to eat by the severing of both vital passages (the windpipe and the gullet). Fish, which were created from the water, do not require any shechitah to render them fit to eat. Birds, which were created from a mixture of soil and water, are rendered fit to eat with the severing of either one of the two vital passages.***

***(Talmud, Chulin 27b)***

***But these you shall not eat of them that chew the cud, or of them that divide the hoof... (11:4)***

***The Torah does not list the animals that have both kosher signs (and are thus kosher), nor does it list those which lack both (and are thus forbidden); but it does name the four animals--the camel, hyrax, hare, and the swine--that have one but not the other (making them, too, unfit for consumption for the Jew).***

***It is noteworthy that in the 33 centuries since G-d communicated these laws to Moses, entire continents, replete with many "new" and unimagined species have been discovered. A number of these hitherto unknown species possess both of the kosher signs, and many lack them both; but not a single one has been found with only one sign. The only such animals on earth are the four species enumerated by the Torah!***

***And the swine, though he divide the hoof and be cloven footed, yet he chews not the cud; he is unclean to you (11:7)***

***Just as the swine when reclining puts forth its hooves as if to say, "See that I am kosher," so too does the empire of Rome boast as it commits violence and robbery, under the guise of establishing a judicial tribunal. This may be compared to a governor who put to death the thieves, adulterers, and sorcerers. He leaned over to a counselor and said: "I myself did these three things in one night."***

***(Midrash Rabbah)***

***These shall you eat of all that are in the waters: whatever has fins and scales (11:9)***

***All fish that have scales also have fins (and are thus kosher). But there are fish that have fins but do not have scales, and are thus impure. If so, the Torah could have written only "scales," without having to also write "fins"? ... Said Rabbi Abahu, and so it was learned in the study house of Rabbi Yishmael: This is so that "Torah be increased and made great" (Isaiah 42:21).***

***(Talmud, Niddah 51b)***

***The student of Torah is comparable to a fish in water, as in Rabbi Akiva's famous parable. His fins are the means by which he moves forward through the water--the intellect and study skills with which he advances in wisdom and increases the Torah and makes it great with his own contributions (chiddushim) to Torah learning. His scales are his protective armor against predators and adverse elements--his fear of Heaven, which shields his learning from error and distortion.***

***One might think that the primary requirement for success in Torah is the fins, while the scales serve a secondary function. It is the fins that move the fish forward, while the scales merely preserve what is. After all, learning is an intellectual exercise; piety and fear of G-d are lofty virtues, but are they any use in navigating the complexities of a difficult Tosafot?***

***In truth, however, the very opposite is the case. A scholar with fins but no scales is a non-kosher fish. He might swim and frolic with his talent and genius, but his learning is corrupt; it is not Torah, but his egoistic arrogation of the divine wisdom. On the other hand, the Talmud tells us that while there are fish with fins and no scales, all fish with scales have fins. If a person approaches Torah with an awe of its divine author and the commitment to serve Him, he will certainly succeed. Regardless of the degree of his intellectual prowess, he will find the fins with which to advance in his learning and contribute to the growth of Torah.***

***(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)***

***And these are they which you shall have in abomination among the birds ... (11:13-19)***

***In Hebrew, the 20 non-kosher species of bird are: nesher, peres, ozniyah, daah, ayah, oreiv, bat yaanah, tachmas, shachaf, netz, kops, shalach, yanshuf, tinshemet, kaat, racham, chassidah, anafah, duchifat, atalef.***

***The commentaries differ as to the identity of many of these species, so that the above translation reflects but one of many interpretations. An alternate rendition, based on traditional commentaries as researched by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan in his Living Torah, is: "eagle, ossifrage, osprey, kite, vulture family, the entire raven family, ostrich, owl, gull, hawk family, falcon, cormorant, ibis, swan, pelican, magpie, stork, heron family, hoopoe, and bat."***

***Other interpretations include the following species in the list (while eliminating others): griffin vulture, albatross, woodpecker, goshawk, long-eared owl, and/or capercaillie.***

***The Talmud offers a number of identifying markers that are common to kosher fowl, including the fact that they are not predators. In practice, Torah law rules that due to the many uncertainties as to the precise identity of the non-kosher birds listed by the Torah, only birds with a tradition of Kashrut should be eaten.***

### **Ritual Purity**

**Carcasses of non-kosher mammals render the one who touches them or carries them tameh, ritually impure, as does the carcass of a kosher animal that was not slaughtered in the prescribed manner. The Torah also lists eight "creeping animals" which render a person tameh: "The rat, the mouse, and the tortoise after its kind; the gecko, the monitor, the lizard, the skink, and the chameleon."**

**Utensils, food and drink also become tameh through contact with a carcass. Food, however, can become tameh only if it has first been made "susceptible" by being wetted with a liquid.**

**A mikveh--a naturally occurring pool of water--or a wellspring do not become tameh; indeed, the mikveh and the wellspring have the power to purify things that have become impure that are immersed in them.**

### **Sanctity and Distinction**

**You shall not make yourselves abominable [by eating] any creeping thing that creeps, neither shall you make yourselves unclean with them, that you should be defiled by them.**

**For I am G-d your G-d; you shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and you shall be holy, for I am holy...**

**This is the law of the beasts, and of the birds, and of every living creature that moves in the waters, and of every creature that creeps on the earth.**

**To differentiate the pure and the impure, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten.**

**And every earthen vessel into which any of them fall... shall be unclean (11:33)**

**If the source of impurity enters within the space of an earthen vessel—even without touching its walls—it becomes impure. If it did not enter into it, even if it touched it from the outside, it remains pure.**

**With all other utensils, the opposite is the case: entering within them alone does not make them impure, while touching any part of them does.**

**(Talmud, Chulin 24b; Rashi)**

**The worth of a utensil of wood or metal is not only in its function as a container—the material of which it is made also has value. So contact with any part of it, including its outside surface, affects its ritual state. On the other hand, an earthen utensil, whose body is mere earth, has value only as a container; accordingly it is affected only by what happens to its inside. Indeed, its inside is therefore even more susceptible to contamination than that of other utensils.**

**Man is an earthen vessel ("And G-d formed man out of the dust of the earth, and He blew into his nostril a living soul"—Genesis 2:7). His worth lies not in his material exterior, but in its content. He should therefore regard as significant only what pertains to his inner self.**

**(The Rebbe of Kotzk)**

***A wellspring or pool (mikveh)... shall be pure (11:36)***

***A wellspring purifies regardless of the amount of the water it contains, and also when flowing; a mikveh purifies only when stationary, and must contain 40 se'ah (approx. 87.5 gallons) of water.***

***(Torat Kohanim)***

***When a person endeavors to venture forth on his own, relying on his own intellect and feelings to guide him in the proper path, he had best be well equipped for the task. For he is then a mikveh, a pool of water no longer in direct contact with its source, which must possess a minimum of so many "gallons" of understanding and fortitude. Furthermore, he must be "stationary," contained and delimited by walls outside of himself; for without such objective control he is susceptible to all sorts of distortions and corruptions. A mikveh that lacks these criteria not only fails to purify other things, but is also itself vulnerable to contamination.***

***On the other hand, one who is a "wellspring," disavowing all pretensions of a "separate identity" from his Source, has no such limitations. His intellect may not be the deepest, his talents quite unspectacular, but the little he has can effectively take on the most challenging of tasks. Nor does he require any confining walls or "closed communities" to safeguard his integrity: wherever he goes and flows, he has a positive effect on his environment and is never negatively influenced by its imperfections. For no matter how scant his resources, and no matter where he ventures forth, he maintains an unbroken attachment to his Source.***

***(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)***

***To differentiate the pure and the impure, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten (11:47)***

***Need this be said regarding the difference between a donkey and a cow? ... Rather, this is to tell us to differentiate between the animal which had half its windpipe cut [during the slaughtering] and the animal which had most of its windpipe cut (According to the laws of shechitah, ritual slaughter, if a majority of the windpipe is not severed in an uninterrupted motion of the slaughterer's knife, the animal is rendered tereifah and unfit for consumption)...***

***Need this be said regarding the difference between a wild ass and a deer? Rather, this is to tell us to differentiate between an animal in which there developed a defect yet remains fit to be eaten and an animal in which there developed a defect which renders it unfit to be eaten.***

***(Torat Kohanim; Rashi)***

**"Benevolence and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed"  
(Psalms 85:11). "Benevolence"--this is Aaron; "truth"--this is Moses.  
"Righteousness" is Moses; "peace" is Aaron.**

### **Midrash Rabbah**

**Can Truth and Benevolence indeed meet? Where and how do Righteousness and Peace converge? Do not Moses and Aaron represent intrinsically incompatible realities?**

**Truth is resolutely objective, while benevolence is gloriously subjective. Peace advocates compromise, which is anathema to rightness. Yet for forty years Moses and Aaron jointly led the people of Israel. The Torah (which freely reports on the negative occurrences within the Israelite camp, including failings on the part of both Moses and Aaron), describes the relationship between the brothers as one of mutual regard and unflagging harmony. In the formative period between their Exodus from Egypt and their entry into the Land, the people of Israel were guided by a leader who conveyed to them the absolute, immutable truth of the divine wisdom and will, and simultaneously led by one who empathized with their human equivocality, and was a master peacemaker and compromiser, resolving conflicts "between a man and his fellow and a man and his wife."**

**To understand the relationship between Moses and Aaron, we must examine the single instance in which their respective modes of leadership did come in conflict. For the Torah records one occasion on which the brothers were in disagreement--a disagreement in which Moses was provoked to anger but then conceded to Aaron.**

### **The Uneaten Offering**

**It was first of Nissan of the year 2449 from Creation (1312 bce), two weeks before the first anniversary of the Exodus--the day in which the Sanctuary was erected and dedicated. Actually, the Sanctuary had already been in operation for seven days, but these were "training" days in which Aaron and his sons were initiated into the priesthood. It was on this, the eighth day, that Aaron assumed his role as Kohen Gadol and the manifest presence of G-d (the Shechinah) came to dwell in the Sanctuary.**

**But then tragedy struck. Aaron's two elder sons, Nadav and Avihu, "offered strange fire before G-d, which G-d had not commanded. A fire came forth from before G-d and consumed them, and they died before G-d" (Leviticus 10:1-2). G-d commanded that the dedication of the Sanctuary should not be disrupted. Although Aaron and his two remaining sons now had the status of a first-day mourners (onanim) who are ordinarily forbidden to eat the holy meat of the offerings, they were expressly commanded to partake of the special offerings which were brought that day in dedication of the Sanctuary.**

**This Aaron, Elazar and Itamar did. But there was also another offering brought that day, one that was not connected with the dedication per se. This was the goat which is brought on the first of every month as a sin-offering. It was over this offering that Moses and Aaron had their disagreement.**

**Moses saw that the flesh of the goat had been burned, as the law mandates should be done with an offering, which, for whatever reason, cannot be eaten. He angrily demanded why it wasn't eaten as G-d had commanded concerning the other sacrifices.**

**Aaron explained that he had drawn a distinction between kodshei sha'ah, offerings which G-d commands to bring on a one-time basis under special circumstances, and kodshei dorot, regularly scheduled offerings which apply equally to all generations. If G-d commanded something concerning the one-time offerings brought for the Sanctuary's dedication, argued Aaron, one should not deduce that the same is to apply to the monthly sin-offering. Here, the regular laws, which forbid its consumption by a mourner, should apply.**

**Moses listened to Aaron's argument and conceded that he was right. He freely admitted that the distinction had escaped him and that Aaron had concluded correctly.**

### **Absolutism and Vicissitude**

**Here we have the confrontation between Truth and Benevolence, between Righteousness on the one hand and Peace on the other. Moses, as transmitter of Torah--truth par excellence--saw no reason to distinguish between kodshei sha'ah and kodshei dorot, between something that is a product of the specialty of the moment and that which is routine in man's service of G-d. What is true and right is always true and right, regardless of the circumstances.**

**Aaron, on the other hand, was the High Priest of Israel, the very embodiment of a people's striving to come close to and serve their G-d. He understood that man's service of G-d is an offering of the sum-total of what man possesses, a giving of the utmost of his or her subjective self. He appreciated that there are up and downs in the life of man, and that which is expected of him in his finest, most inspired hours does not necessarily apply to his routine, everyday self.**

**Hence the conflict. On one side stands Moses, conveying the divine truth and will-- a truth and will as unequivocal as their conceiver. On the other side stands Aaron, leading a people's endeavor to approach that very truth and that very will with the tools of their human selves--a subjective mind with which to seek, an equivocal heart with which to feel, and actions subject to the circumstances under which they are undertaken.**

**And what happens? Moses agrees with Aaron! Absolute truth grants legitimacy to the "sub-truths" of a relative world.**

**Indeed, what did happen? How has this seemingly irresolvable contradiction been resolved?**

**Points of Contact**

**What happened was that Moses gained a deeper understanding into the nature of truth.**

**When contemplating and discussing our own, decidedly subjective, reality, we freely use the adjective "truth". We speak of our "true feelings" and our "true desires"; we claim to "truly understand" something or to have discovered "the true facts" surrounding a certain occurrence. But if we define "truth" as a reality that is absolute and unequivocal, it would seem that the term could be correctly applied to only to consummate truth of the Divine. Are all applications of term to our circumstantial reality nothing more than self-deceptions?**

Chassidic teaching says not. Indeed, the prophet (Jeremiah 10:10) proclaims, "G-d is truth"; but the Chassidic masters understand this to mean not only that G-d is the essence of truth, but also that He is the source of all that goes by the name of "truth" in our world. His truth is absolute; all other "truths" are relative, with no inherent reality other than that which He chooses to grant it. But it is He who created these subjective realities, and in doing so He has imparted a legitimacy and truth to their existence. So if we find relative truths in His creation, these are expressions (albeit imperfect expressions) of His all-pervading truth---as manifested within the bounds of the many "worlds" or realities which He has created.

In other words, when a person gives it his "all," his ultimate, he attains a personal absolute--something which, within the context of his subjective, personal world, is true. And all truth, including such subjective truths, are expressions of a deeper truth that is their source and empowerer--the truth of their Creator. So his personal truth touches the truth of G-d.

This is the joint legacy of Moses and Aaron: That we must strive towards the truth, guided by the directives of Torah and utilizing the talents and resources which we have been granted. We need not be dissuaded from our quest by the finitude of our understanding, the subjectivity of our feelings, and the circumstantiality of our deeds. If our efforts are true--albeit "true" only within the context of our relative existence--then "Moses" will concede to "Aaron" that this truth is part and parcel of the Absolute Truth toward which we strive.

# Final Thoughts

**All of what we are, we see, we did and will do, is the Work of HaShem  
“May it be Your Will, HaShem, that the Holy Temple be rebuilt speedily  
in our days and grant us our share in Your Torah....”**