

**Yad Avraham Institute**  
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES

**Portion of Shemini**

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**Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita**

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**About the Yad Avraham Institute**

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**Yad Avraham Institute**  
**New York**  
**April 16, 2015**

**B"H**

## Shemini

*Presented by*

**Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita**

**Dean**

### ***1. Satisfying the Attribute of Justice***

The Torah states, **“Moshe and Aaron came to the Tent of Meeting, and they went out and they blessed the people – and the Glory of G’d appeared to the entire people.”** Rashi cites Chazal (Toras Kohanim) which explains that after Aaron had officiated on the eighth day and brought all of the required sacrifices, a fire did not descend from heaven to consume them. The fire descending from heaven would have been a representation of G’d’s Presence entering into the Mishkan. When Aaron had done all that he was commanded to do and saw that the Divine Presence did not descend, he was pained. He said to Moshe, “I understand that the reason the Divine Presence did not enter, is because G’d is angry with me (because of my participation with the Golden Calf). Moshe my brother this is what you have done to me! I have entered and I have become embarrassed!” Moshe and Aaron immediately entered into the Tent to supplicate G’d for Mercy so that the Divine Presence should descend. It was only after their supplication for Mercy did the Divine Presence descend on behalf the Jewish people.

The Torah tells us that G’d chose Moshe to be His spokesman and to be the one to receive the Torah on behalf of the Jewish people. Rambam writes in the Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah, the word of Moshe is the equivalent of the Word of G’d. If this is so, how could Aaron even have considered saying to Moshe, “Moshe my brother this is what you have done to me! I have entered and I have become embarrassed!” Aaron’s appointment as High Priest was only due to G’d’s dictate to Moshe that Aaron was the one qualified for the position. How could have Aaron attributed his embarrassment to something that Moshe had done? It is interesting to note that when Korach attempted to usurp Moshe’s authority as G’d’s spokesman, he questioned the credibility of Moshe’s appointment of his brother Aaron to be the High Priest. Korach claimed that the basis for Aaron’s appointment was nepotism. It was Moshe’s personal choice to appoint his brother and it

was not the word of G’d to do so. It is impossible to even consider that Aaron, who was the equivalent of his brother Moshe, would consider suggesting that his appointment to be the High Priest was based on Moshe’s personal choice. If so, what did Aaron mean when he said, “Moshe my brother this is what you have done to me! I have entered and I have become embarrassed?” How could Aaron claim that Moshe had done something to embarrass him if in fact G’d was the one who appointed him to be the High Priest?

Chazal tell us that when Aaron had approached the altar and had seen its corners which resembled horns, he was embarrassed. It was because it reminded him of the golden calf, in which he had participated. He was therefore hesitant to approach the altar to officiate. Moshe said to him, “It is because of your deep sense of remorse about the sin golden calf and your humility that you was chosen to be the High Priest.” If Aaron in fact was qualified to be the High Priest, and it was G’d’s dictate that he should officiate on the eighth day of the inauguration of the Mishkan, why did he suffer public embarrassment due to the Divine Presence not descending into the Mishkan?

The Torah tells us that Nadav and Avihu, the two elder and most special sons of Aaron were struck down by G’d on the day that they were initiated as Priests, the eighth day of the inauguration after the Divine Presence had entered into the Mishkan. The Midrash tells us that Moshe said to Aaron, “Aaron, my brother, I knew that He would be sanctified through those who are closest to Him. Initially I had thought it would be either me or you to bring about this sanctification through our death. However, after the death of Nadav and Avihu I understand that they are greater than we are. (What is the meaning of ‘I will be sanctified through those who Honor Me?’ When G’d brings judgment upon the righteous, He becomes revered, elevated, and extolled...)” Thus, the death of Nadav and Avihu was brought about by the Attribute of Justice, which needed to be expressed on the day that the Divine Presence entered into the Mishkan.

Moshe, understanding that after Aaron and his children were installed to be Priests, G'd's Name needed to be sanctified through the one who was closest to Him. He therefore chose not to supplicate G'd for the Attribute of Mercy to allow Aaron's service to be valued and received. He believed that his brother Aaron should be publically embarrassed because of his involvement with the golden calf. This embarrassment would cause the Attribute of Justice to manifest itself differently. The pain of the embarrassment to Aaron was meant to atone for him rather than his life being taken. This is the basis for Aaron's question to Moshe, "Why did you not supplicate G'd for His Mercy earlier so that my embarrassment should have been averted?" We find something similar regarding Chizkiyahu, the king of Judah.

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that G'd wanted Chizkiyahu, the king of Judah to be Moshiach and Sancherev with his armies should be *gog u mogog* (Armageddon); however, it did not come to be. It was because the Attribute of Justice had a claim regarding a shortcoming of Chizkiyahu's spirituality. He did not sing the praises of G'd (shirah) after G'd had brought about a miracle that destroyed the camp of Sancherev and his armies who were poised to destroy Jerusalem. Similarly, although Aaron had brought a sin offering to atone for his participation in the (building) of the golden calf; nevertheless, it was not sufficient to fully vindicate him because a sacrifice is only effective within the Attribute of Mercy. As we in the Torah regarding sacrifices, the name of G'd (Hashem – YKVK) that connotes the Attribute of Mercy is mentioned. Thus, the Attribute of Justice still had a claim against Aaron. It was not until Moshe and he supplicated G'd for mercy that the claim was quelled.

Moshe believed that the embarrassment that Aaron would experience would be considered by G'd to be sufficient to satisfy the Attribute of Justice. However, it was not so, as was proven with the death of Nadav and Avihu when they were struck down by G'd. Moshe then shared with Aaron his brother that initially G'd had told him that He would be sanctified by those who were closest to Him. Thus, the death of Aaron's sons was a confirmation that they were greater than Moshe and Aaron.

## 2. Moshe's Qualification as High Priest

The Torah states, "It was on the eighth day, Moshe summoned Aaron and his sons..." It was on the eighth day that Aaron and his sons began to officiate in the

Mishkan. The Midrash states, "During the seven day period that Moshe was at the burning bush G'd said to him, 'I want you to go (to Egypt) and fulfill My agency (to redeem My children).' Moshe responded, 'You should send the one who is qualified to be (and who has been, Aaron) Your agent' This dialogue between G'd and Moshe continued for seven days. After the seventh day, G'd said to Moshe, 'Every day I tell you to go and every day you answer Me to send the one who is more qualified. I swear on your life that tomorrow you will be punished (for your obstinacy). When the Mishkan will be completed, initially you will believe that you will officiate as the High Priest. However, I will tell you to summon Aaron to officiate, as the verse states '...**Moshe summoned Aaron and his sons...**'"

The Torah states after the seven-day dialogue between G'd and Moshe at the burning bush, "**The wrath of G'd burned against Moshe and He said, 'Is there not Aaron your brother the Levy? I know that he will surely speak...'**" Rashi cites Chazal who explain that when G'd referred to Aaron as "**your brother the Levy**" G'd was in fact saying to Moshe, "Until now Aaron was qualified only to be the Levy; however, because of your obstinacy (which was considered a disrespect) you would forfeit the Priesthood to your brother Aaron who would be the Priest (Kohen)." Seemingly, according to Chazal cited by Rashi at the time of the burning bush, Moshe was informed by G'd that he had forfeited the Priesthood and his brother Aaron would be the one to officiate as the High Priest. If so, why was Moshe under the impression when the Mishkan was completed that he would be the one to officiate as the High Priest? Evidently, when G'd had said to Moshe at the time of the burning bush that Aaron would speak on his behalf, he did not fully understand what G'd had said to him. It was only at the time of the completion of the Mishkan that Moshe understood in retrospect what G'd had told him at the burning bush. Why did G'd not elucidate this aspect of the prophecy at the burning bush to Moshe? Why did he need to wait until the completion of the Mishkan to inform him of this fact?

Rambam writes in the Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah that when a prophecy is communicated, if it is something of a positive nature, it will come to fruition although the circumstances for its coming about may change- such as the beneficiaries are no longer worthy of the prophecy. However, if the prophecy is of a negative nature, because it forebodes some punishment to atone for spiritual failing, then it does not necessarily need to come to be because one has the ability to repent. If G'd would

have communicated to Moshe at the burning bush a coherent, clear, and distinct prophecy that Aaron would be the High Priest and that his sons would be the Priests, it would mean that the firstborn (*bechorim*) who were naturally qualified to be the Priests would no longer be qualified to officiate. Initially, the firstborn Jewish males were meant to officiate as the Priests to bring the sacrifices. It is because they possess the characteristic of being the “first” which is G’d’s characteristic of being the “first.” They thus had greater relevance and commonality to G’d than any other person. However, because of the sin of the golden calf, the firstborn forfeited their right to officiate as the Priests, because they became tainted with the sin of idolatry. The only tribe that retained their pristine spiritual status, since they did not participate in the sin of the golden calf, was the tribe of Levy. Therefore, only Aaron and his children were qualified to be the Priests. Thus, Aaron and his sons only assumed the position of Priests as a result of the sin of the golden calf disqualifying the firstborn from officiating.

If G’d had definitively communicated to Moshe at the burning bush that he was no longer qualified to be the Priest because of his obstinacy to carry out the agency of being the “redeemer” and Aaron his brother would assume the position of Priest, in essence G’d would have been saying that the firstborn were no longer qualified to officiate as Priests. This would have been foreboding the sin of the golden calf which was the basis for the disqualification of the first born. Therefore, G’d communicated to Moshe at the burning bush in a context of ambiguity, so that he should not understand all the ramifications and aspects of the prophecy. It was only at the time of the completion of the Mishkan that Moshe understood in retrospect what G’d had told him at the burning bush.

G’d wanted the firstborn to be the Priests, However Moshe would have been the first choice at the second level to be the Priest. However, because of his display of obstinacy, he forfeited this right to his brother Aaron. This is similar to what happened at the time of the sin of the golden calf. Initially the firstborn forfeited their right to be the priests and thus it was forfeited to the second level. This is not happenstance that Moshe had made a mistake, but it was predestined that things should not manifest themselves at the ultimate level. As the Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zorah tells us that the Jewish people sinning with the golden calf is an example of a community failing and repenting whereas king David is an example of a single individual failing and repenting.

### ***3. Aaron’s Silence Despite the Immeasurable Loss***

The Torah tells us that on the eighth day of the inauguration of the Mishkan, the Divine Presence entered into the Mishkan. It expressed itself as fire that consumed the offerings. When the Jewish people witnessed the Divine Presence coming upon the altar they sang G’d’s Praises and prostrated themselves. At that moment, Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aaron brought forth fire pans with incense, which was considered sinful. The Torah states, **“A fire came forth from G’d and consumed them, and they died before Hashem. Moshe said to Aaron: Of this did Hashem speak, saying, ‘I will be sanctified through those who are nearest to Me, thus I will be honored before the entire people.’ Aaron remained silent.”**

Rashi cites the Midrash, “Where did G’d tell Moshe that He would be sanctified through those who are ‘nearest to Me?’ It states, **‘I will be sanctified with My own Glory...’** The verse should not be read, ‘I will be sanctified with My Glory...’ but rather it should be read, ‘I will be sanctified through those who Honor Me...’ Moshe said to Aaron, ‘Aaron, my brother, I knew that His House would be sanctified through those who are closest to Him. Initially I had thought it would be either me or you to bring about this sanctification through our death. However, after the death of Nadav and Avihu I understand that they are greater than we are. Aaron remained silent.” Nadav and Avihu, the two sons of Aaron were destined to be the leaders of the Jewish people as the successors of Moshe and Aaron. Their level of spirituality was unique. Despite their young age they were struck down by G’d soon after they had entered into adulthood (*bar mitzvah*). Regardless of the level of personal loss and loss to the Jewish people, Aaron remained silent.

Rashi cites Chazal, “Aaron received reward for remaining silent.” Although one who experiences such a dimension of loss would normally react from pain, Aaron remained silent. If one were an angel (a completely spiritual being) and had the clarity to understand the value of such a tragedy, it would be understandable that one would remain silent. However, Aaron although he had a unique dimension of clarity he had the limitation of being human. Despite this, he remained silent. Thus, he was deserving of reward for his silence. In what context did Aaron quantify the death of his sons and thus was able to remain silent?

Sforno explains, "Aaron remained silent because he understood that his children were the object that had brought about a sanctification of G'd's Name. Thus, he was consoled with the understanding of the unlimited spiritual value of their death." The lesson to be drawn from the Divine retribution that came upon the sons of Aaron was that G'd does not overlook even the slightest spiritual infraction, regardless of one's advanced record of spirituality. As the Gemara in Tractate Bava Kama states, "If one says that G'd overlooks and turns a 'blind eye' on the imperfection of one's record, his life should be compromised." The death of Nadav and Avihu confirmed on the most obvious level, this fact. Thus, the sanctification of G'd's Name through their deaths was a consolation for Aaron.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that at the time when Rebbe Akiva was condemned to be put to death by the Romans, he was tortured by having his flesh scathed off of his body by the Roman executioner. His students who were present at the time, wept for their teacher. He asked them, "Why are you crying? Do you not realize that I have waited for this moment my entire life? As it states in the Shema that one must love G'd with all your heart and all your soul. Meaning, one must even give his life to demonstrate his love for G'd. This is the greatest moment of my life because I can fulfill this great mitzvah!" Although his students were weeping over the incalculable loss of their teacher and his future Torah lessons, he was imbued with joy. Rebbe Akiva's students cried because of their personal loss. His unique dimension and depth of Torah knowledge was compared to being able to uproot mountains and grind them together. This greatness and advanced level of Torah would be lost forever.

The Gemara in Tractate Menachos tells us that Rebbe Akiva was able to extrapolate "mounds and mounds of laws" from the crowns of the letters that are written in the Torah. This incomparable loss of Torah to them and the world brought his students to tears. In contrast, he was overjoyed because he understood the unlimited value of his death within the context of sanctification of G'd's Name. The sanctification of G'd's Name supersedes and has greater value than all the Torah that Rebbe Akiva would have disseminated had he not been killed. Why did Rebbe Akiva deserve to meet such an untimely, painful, and tragic death?

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that Rebbe Akiva and his colleagues visited the great Reb

Eliezer Ben Hurkonus when he was on his death bed. Reb Eliezer Ben Hurkonus asked Rebbe Akiva and his students why they had not come sooner to visit. (His colleagues had put him in an excommunicated state, because he was not willing to accept the ruling of the majority and relinquish his own opinion.) He reprimanded Rebbe Akiva because of his unique capacity and acumen in Torah, that he did not come to study from him. He said to Rebbe Akiva, "My arms that are upon my chest are like two Torah Scrolls. The Torah that only you could have learned from me but you did not (because you did not come), will never be revealed in this world. No one but you has the capacity and ability to comprehend the Torah that I had to offer. Because of your choice of not coming to study from me, this Torah will never be revealed to the world. Therefore, your end will come about on the most tragic level." Since Rebbe Akiva had the capacity to be the transmitter of the special level of Torah that Reb Eliezer Ben Hurkonus had to offer, he was held accountable and liable. Seemingly, Rebbe Akiva's death was a punishment for his not coming to study from Reb Eliezer.

Rebbe Akiva understood that his death, within the context of sanctification of G'd's Name, had unlimited value, because the sanctification of G'd's Name that would be brought about through his death was the equivalent (or greater) of the sanctification of G'd's Name that would have been brought about through the transmission of the Torah that he could have revealed through the teachings of Reb Eliezer Ben Hurkonus. When Reb Eliezer forecasted the manner in which Rebbe Akiva would die, it was not a curse, but rather it was to give Rebbe Akiva an understanding that his death would be a correction for the tragic mistake of not coming to study the unique Torah from Reb Eliezer the great. Similarly, Nadav and Navihu's death was a sanctification of G'd's Name, which established G'd as the true Judge. This sanctification had greater value than the lives they would have lived by being spiritually productive.

#### ***4. Sin, an Impediment to Torah Clarity***

The Torah states, "**Moshe said, 'This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do; then the glory of Hashem will appear to you (the Divine Presence will Descend).'**" The verse does not explain to what Moshe is referring when he said, "**This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do....**" Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains, "It seems to me that Moshe is referring to what was stated in the previous verse. The Torah states, '**...the entire assembly approached and stood before Hashem.**'"

The Torah is telling us they must prepare themselves to stand before G'd Himself to be worthy of the Divine Presence. One who understands and appreciates that he is standing before G'd, will come to understand the ultimate objective of existence. As King David writes, 'I have set before Me G'd always...' One who has a sense that he is in the presence of G'd will not deviate from the Torah. If one truly has reverence because he feels that he is in the Presence of G'd, there will be no partition that will separate him from G'd. As it states in Yeshaya, 'Your sins separate you from G'd (to create a partition)...'

Ohr HaChaim continues, "After I have written this, another interpretation comes to mind from the words of Chazal. The verse, '**This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you...**' is referring to circumcision. As it states in the book of Yehoshuah. If the Jewish people were all circumcised during the time of Yehoshuah, to what is it referring? It is referring to the covering that is on the heart of man. The covering of the heart (orlas haLeiv) is what separates one from G'd because it distances one from the fear and reverence of G'd. Once that covering is removed, one will be able to have a sufficient level of reverence for G'd and only then will His Glory come to dwell amongst them. There is another Midrash (Yalkut) that tells us that if the evil inclination will be removed from one's heart all will be able to have reverence for G'd and serve Him in a unique manner. As it states, 'You shall all circumcise the covering of your heart...' Thus, in order to be worthy of an intimate relationship with G'd, one must remove all obstructions such as the covering that exists on one's heart.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos states, "After the destruction of the Temple, G'd only has the four cubits of halacha (definitive law) in His world." After the destruction of the Temple, the Divine Presence is located where definitive law is being studied and elucidated. When does one merit Torah to create a location for the Divine Presence? The Gemara in Tractate Yomah states, "The storage location (repository) for Torah is one's fear of G'd." As it is stated in the verse, "The fear of G'd is its (the Torah) storage location." It is only when one has sufficient reverence for G'd will he be the appropriate receptacle for the Torah. Why is this so?

Torah is linked to the Divine Presence as it is indicated by the passage in the Gemara in Tractate Berachos. In addition, it is comprised of the letters of His Divine and unpronounceable Names. However if one has the covering on his heart, which is sin or a deficiency in

reverence, then he will not come upon the truth of Torah. It is because his study is not linked with the Divine Presence. One must study Torah with the intent of actualizing the mitzvos and not merely as an intellectual pursuit. G'd has no relevance to the Torah study that is done for the sake of intellectualism, because it has no relevance to the Divine Presence.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the only reason one has difficulty comprehending and understanding the Talmud is because one is soiled with sin. He cites the verse from Yeshaya, "Your sins separate you from G'd and create a partition..." If one has a separation, then he cannot come upon the truth of Torah. This is the reason Moshe told the Jewish people "**This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do; then the glory of Hashem will appear to you...**" They must remove all spiritual obstructions in order for them to cleave to G'd.

## ***5. The Profoundness of the Joy Within Aaron's Heart***

The Torah tells us that on the eighth day of the inauguration of the Mishkan, Moshe installed Aaron as the High Priest just as he was commanded to do so by G'd. Why was Aaron uniquely qualified to be the High Priest? The Midrash states, "Reb Shimon Bar Yochai says, 'G'd said, 'The heart that rejoiced over the greatness of his brother (for being chosen as the Redeemer of Israel), will merit the precious stones (of the breastplate) to be placed upon it. As it states, '**Aaron should carry the names of the Children of Israel on the breastplate of judgment on his heart...**'" The Torah identifies the location of the breastplate to be upon the heart of Aaron, which indicates its unique status and dimension. Although Aaron was the elder of Moshe, when Moshe was chosen by G'd to be the Redeemer of Israel, he experienced joy in his heart for when he was informed of his brother's appointment.

Before Moshe returned to Egypt as the Redeemer, G'd had engaged with him at the burning bush over a seven-day period in order to convince him that he was truly as the Redeemer and he would succeed in that role. After G'd had engaged with Moshe for seven days, Moshe said, "**Please, My Lord, send through whomever You will send!**" Chazal explain that since Aaron functioned in the capacity as G'd's Agent and Prophet in Egypt, Moshe had said, "Let the one who had been chosen in the past be Your representative to be the Redeemer." G'd insisted that Moshe was the only one who was truly qualified. Although

Aaron had been G'd's Agent and the older brother of Moshe, he was not offended when he was passed over to be the Redeemer. The Torah states, **“G'd said to Moshe, ‘When Aaron will be informed of your elevation, he will come out to greet you in the desert and he will see you and have joy in his heart.’”**

The Gemara in Tractate Pesachim tells us that the *Bnei Biseira* were the Princes of Israel when Hillel had come to the Land of Israel from Babylon. When the *Bnei Biseira* initially met Hillel they realized that he was greater than they. Appreciating Hillel's greatness, they relinquished their position as princes of Israel to him. The *Bnei Biseira* demonstrated a unique level of humility by conceding their position to Hillel. However, Aaron was not only not offended when he was passed over by G'd to be the Redeemer, he rejoiced in his brother's good fortune. This is the reason his heart qualified to be the location of the breastplate.

The Midrash states, “For the seven days that Moshe officiated in the Mishkan and sprinkled the blood of the offerings, G'd said to him, ‘Do you think that you will be the High Priest? Call Aaron and his children...’” While it is understandable that Aaron's heart was uniquely qualified to wear the breastplate, why does it qualify him to be the Kohen and the High Priest? The High Priest is the ultimate officiant of G'd who represents the entire Jewish people in His service. He is the only one qualified to enter into the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur to plead for the atonement of the Jewish people.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that one who benefits from his own handiwork is greater than one who has fear of heaven. Maharal of Prague explains that the meaning of this passage is that the one who can have benefit from his own earnings, regardless of how meager they may be, is greater than the one who fears G'd. He is the one who is satisfied with his lot. It is only because he is able to be satisfied and not feel deprived or denied that it demonstrates his love for G'd. It is only because he internalizes G'd's love for him, that he can understand that not having more is truly in his best interest. Thus, he can have benefit from his handiwork, regardless of how meager it may be.

In contrast, one who fears G'd, although he is in awe of his Maker, and does not question G'd's decision that he should have less, he nevertheless would prefer to have more in order to satisfy his lack. Thus, the one who can benefit from his handiwork is greater than the one who

reveres G'd because to love G'd is greater than to fear G'd. With this understanding we can appreciate the special dimension of Reb Chanina Ben Dosa. The Gemara tells us that every day a Heavenly Voice emanates from *Choreiv* (Sinai) and declares, “The entire world is sustained in the merit of Chanina My son and it is sufficient for him to subsist on a small measure of carob from one eve of Shabbos to the next.” The heavenly voice states that “it was sufficient” for Reb Chanina Ben Dosa, regardless of the paltry amount, in order to reveal that he had no interest or need in having more elucidate why his was so special and his merit was so great. It was a demonstration and expression of his love for G'd.

The Mishna in Ethics of Our Fathers states, “Who is the wealthy individual? The one who has joy in his portion.” The Mishna does not state that the wealthy man is one who has “everything” or “enough.” Rather, it is the one who experiences joy in his portion who is considered wealthy. The only way one can truly be satisfied and feel joy is if he has love for G'd. He understands that his having less is only because G'd gave him less because it is in his best interest to have more. Similarly, Aaron had joy in his heart when Moshe was chosen to be the Redeemer because he understood due to his unique level of love for G'd, that it was in his best interest not to be chosen to be the Redeemer. The joy was a confirmation of the unique level of love that Aaron possessed for G'd. He was thus uniquely qualified to be the High Priest, the ultimate officiant of G'd.