

**Selected Shorts: Shmini**  
**Rabbi Eiot Malomet April 10, 2021 27 Nisan 5781**

ויקרא ט:א'

(א) ויהי ביום השמיני קרא משה לאהרן ולבגיו ולזקני ישראל:

**Leviticus 9:1**

(1) *On the eighth day Moses called Aaron and his sons, and the elders of Israel.* Deeply rooted in the symbolic system of Bible and Judaism, “seven” signifies Creation, “seven days” is unit of “passage time” – the time that one moves from one “zone” of being to another. The eighth day signifies the new beginning, which is exactly what is happening here: the Kohanim are starting their new life, as is the sanctuary.

ויקרא ט:כ"ד

(כד) ותצא אש מלפני ה' ותאכל על-המזבח את-העלה ואת-הקלבים וירא כל-העם וירגזו ויפלו על-פניהם:

**Leviticus 9:24**

(24) *Fire came forth from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat parts on the altar. And all the people saw, and shouted, and fell on their faces.* Basically, up until this moment, they have brought almost every type of sacrifice on the menu. The fire here is an emanation of God, often overlooked as a miracle. The key to understanding this moment is that it is a moment of “ignition”. Provided this fire was kept constant (which they were instructed to do) every subsequent sacrifice will be related to the first sacrifice. The notion of an “eternal” flame symbolically represents a connection to ignition – despite the necessary maintenance.

ויקרא י:א'

(א) ויקחו בני-אהרן נדב ואביהוא איש מחמתו ויתנו בהן אש וישמו עליה קטרת ויקרבו לפני ה' אש זרה אשר לא צוה אתם:

**Leviticus 10:1**

(1) *Now Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu each took his fire pan, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered before the LORD alien fire, which He had not enjoined upon them.* What N and A do? It is up to us to decode the clues and, not surprisingly, we come up with different theories. 1. They took their “own” firepans. That’s an infraction of the holy space. You don’t bring your own equipment into the consecrated zone. 2. They took a different coal, meaning, they had a private fire going somewhere, which was

also an infraction. 3. They put their own blend of incense on their incense pans. Another infraction. The sanctuary had its own “blend” of incense to give it its own unique, trademark scent profile. You don’t have to be an aromachologist or a sommelier to distinguish scents; most people have the ability to identify a particular aroma with a particular location. 4. They brought it before God. Another infraction. 5. It wasn’t commanded. So here we need to go deep. What motivates someone to do something that they are not commanded to do? Note the phenomenon of idiosyncratic moments at weddings, graduations, or other celebratory moments where the participants want to do something “unique” to make the event stand out. Proposition: Nadav and Avihu were putting themselves above the rest of the Kohanim; this was a move that drew attention away from the main event – the inauguration of the altar – to themselves.

ויקרא י:ב'

(ב) ותצא אש מלפני ה' ותאכל אותם וימתו לפני ה':

**Leviticus 10:2**

(2) *And fire came forth from the LORD and consumed them; thus they died at the instance of the LORD.* Arguably, Nadav and Avihu violated the sacred order of the sanctuary. The “measure for measure” principle is invoked here: an infraction with fire meets with a consequence of fire. Unsurprisingly, there are many different views on this.

ויקרא י:ג'

(ג) ויאמר משה אל-אהרן הוא אשר-דבר ה' | לאמר בקרבך אקדש ועל-פני כל-העם אפגד וידם אהרן:

**Leviticus 10:3**

(3) *Then Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the LORD meant when He said: Through those near to Me I show Myself holy, And gain glory before all the people.” And Aaron was silent.* Why does Moses react this way? Being so focused on the proper execution of the ceremony, he is expressing his exasperation on the violation rather than the death. Aaron’s response of silence is bewilderment, confusion, and perhaps an attempt at self-control. In this moment his two sons have been incinerated, and Moses is worried about the proper execution of the ritual?! There

must be something else going on here. This moment is the priestly equivalent to the Golden Calf incident. We recall that Moses and Aaron also had “words” when that happened. Despite the deep partnership between the two brothers, there is a hint, here and elsewhere (picked up by the rabbis) that there is also a bit of jealousy between the two of them. Moses was a prophet, but he also may have wanted to be a priest. Aaron is the head of a dynasty of priests – to this day, all Kohanim descend from Aaron; whereas Moses’ line ends with him. The Sanctuary is a highly ordered set of zones, but there is no zone immune from the messiness of human relationships.

ויקרא י"ח-י"א

(ח) וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל־אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר: (ט) גִּינוּ וְשָׂכַר אֶל־תְּשׁוּבָתוֹ אֶתְּהוֹ אֶתְּהוֹ וַיְבַנְיָהוּ אֶתְּהוֹ בְּבָאֲכֶם אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְלֹא תִמְתּוּ תִקַּח עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם: (י) וְלֹהֲבָדִיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ וּבֵין הַקֹּדֶשׁ וּבֵין הַטְּמֵא וּבֵין הַטְּהוֹר: (יא) וְלֹהוֹרֹת אֶת־בְּגֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת כָּל־הַחֻקִּים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' אֲלֵיכֶם בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה: (פ)

### Leviticus 10:8-11

(8) *And the LORD spoke to Aaron, saying: (9) Drink no wine or other intoxicant, you or your sons, when you enter the Tent of Meeting, that you may not die. This is a law for all time throughout the ages, (10) for you must distinguish between the sacred and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean; (11) and you must teach the Israelites all the laws which the LORD has imparted to them through Moses.* Coming right after the incident, these laws are interpreted as the rationale for the catastrophe: Nadav and Avihu were OWI (officiating while intoxicated).

ויקרא י"ט-כ'

(יט) וַיְדַבֵּר אֲהֲרֹן אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הֵן הַיּוֹם הַקָּרִיבוּ אֶת־חַטָּאתָם וְאֶת־עֹלָתָם לִפְנֵי ה' וְחַטְּרָאנָה אֶתִּי כְּאֵלֶּה וְאֶכְלָתִי חַטָּאת הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וְיִטֵּב בְּעֵינַי ה': (כ) וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה וַיִּיטֵב בְּעֵינָיו: (פ)

### Leviticus 10:19-20

(19) *And Aaron spoke to Moses, “See, this day they brought their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD, and such things have befallen me! Had I eaten sin offering today, would the LORD have approved?” (20) And when Moses heard this, he approved.* While Moses wants Aaron to complete the rite, Aaron considers himself unqualified because of the calamity. Moses acquiesces. This is a moment of reconciliation. It also suggests that while Moses has supreme authority in matters of legislation and leadership, Aaron has supreme authority in matters of the ritual and the sanctuary.

ויקרא י"א:ב'

(ב) וַיְבָרֵךְ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאֹמֶר זֹאת הַסִּיָּה אֲשֶׁר תֹּאכְלוּ מִכָּל־הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאָרֶץ:

### Leviticus 11:2

(2) *Speak to the Israelite people thus: These are the creatures that you may eat from among all the land animals:* These are instructions given by Moses and Aaron. They are a team once again. And these instructions form the foundation of the dietary system. We theorize that in the Creation story, the Torah presents vegetarianism as an ideal: Adam and Eve are instructed to eat from things that grow on earth rather than from the flesh of things that live off of it. But we saw how well that worked out. Meat eating already precedes Noah. Abel after all, is a shepherd, and he wasn't raising sheep just for wool and milk. Indeed, modern evolutionary biologists believe that eating animal flesh (and cooking it with fire) was essential to the development of the human species. Noting that humans needed meat, craved meat, and formed a large part of their social structure around the procurement and consumption of meat for the efficient acquisition of energy, protein, minerals, and vitamins, the Torah creates a compromise: eat the flesh of animals but from these distinct categories that signify the realms God has created: earth, air, and water. Eat animals that do not straddle the categories. Do not eat portions of the animal without killing the animal first; cause as little suffering to the animal as possible while taking its life; do not consume its blood. In so doing, you live a holy life.

ויקרא י"א:ג'

(ג) כָּל אֲמִפְרָסֹת פְּרִסָּה וְשִׁסְעַת וְשִׁסְעַת פְּרִסָּת מֵעֵלֶת גֶּרֶה... (ט) אֶת־זֶה תֹּאכְלוּ מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם כָּל אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ סַנְפִּיר וְקַשְׁקִשׁוֹת בַּמַּיִם... (יג) וְאֶת־אֵלֶּה תִשְׁקָצוּ מִדֶּעוֹף לֹא יֹאכְלוּ וְשִׁקְצוּ הֵם אֶת־הַבָּשָׂר וְאֶת־הַפֶּרֶס וְאֶת־הַדְּעוֹנָה:

### Leviticus 11:3, 9, 13

(3) *any animal that has true hoofs, with clefts through the hoofs, and that chews the cud... (9) These you may eat of all that live in water: anything in water, whether in the seas or in the streams, that has fins and scales... (13) The following...shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, and the black vulture...Kashrut compressed. Edible animals share one basic trait – they are not flesh-eating hunters or scavengers. They reflect the vegetarian ideal and we in turn...eat them!*

*Let's hear it for tofu! Shabbat Shalom!*