

Aaron and his remaining sons were supposed to eat (10:16-20). What had been done with it? What is Moshe's initial reaction and what does Aaron reply? Note who speaks more, and who gets the final word.



The Conservative Yeshiva is a Project of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

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The weekly Haftarah Commentary
By Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein, Senior CY Faculty in Talmud and Midrash,
may be found at; <http://www.uscj.org.il/learn/commentaries/>

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TORAH SPARKS

Shabbat Mevarkhim Hahodesh

Parashat Shemini

April 21-22, 2017 – 26 Nisan 5777

Annual (Leviticus 9:1-11:47): Etz Hayim p. 630-642; Hertz p. 443-454

Triennial (Leviticus 9:1-10:11): Etz Hayim p. 630-635; Hertz p. 443-447

Haftarah (2 Samuel 6:1-7:17): Etz Hayim p. 643-648; Hertz p. 454-458

Is there such a thing as Divine Justice?

Allan Myers is a member of Edgware Masorti Synagogue, London UK

In this week's sedra we find the strange episode of Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, who apparently made some kind of sacrifice using what the Torah calls *esh zara* - "strange fire" (Lev. 10:1). We are told that the manner in which this sacrifice was offered broke God's rules and, as a result, Nadav and Avihu were themselves summarily executed, "consumed by fire which came forth from the Lord (10:2)."

Our Sages have puzzled over this episode for millennia, but I don't believe anyone has come up with a satisfactory reason why God decided to punish the two brothers who wished to serve Him in their own way.

On Monday, we will commemorate *Yom HaShoah*, the day set aside to commemorate the Holocaust in the Jewish calendar – a day on which we remember (amongst others) those who were killed by fire for no apparent reason.

As I said, the Sages through the ages have tried to come up with an explanation as to why Nadav and Avihu were executed. For instance,

Rashi, in his commentary on Leviticus 10:2, quotes a midrash speculating that they were drunk (based on the fact that the passage which follows this episode in the Torah tells of the dangers of strong drink). In the same way some of our more egregious modern commentators have suggested that the victims of the Holocaust must have sinned. Some commentators have even attributed the victim's culpability to sins committed in his or her previous life. This rationale was epitomised by a claim made by Rabbi Ovadia Yosef in his weekly sermon on 5 August 2000, and reported with horror by news outlets the next day (you can find many examples online). He said that the murder of the six million happened because of their reincarnated souls. Those souls had apparently sinned and had been given the chance to atone by returning in new bodies. They failed to achieve *t'shuvah*, repentance, and so received their punishment in the Holocaust.

This is part of a tradition, begun in the Talmud and reinforced by the kabbalists, that, if disaster strikes, **we** must be to blame. If the Rabbis couldn't identify the sins we had committed which led to the disaster, they developed the idea of *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred, such as that which is said to have led to the destruction of the Second Temple.

Maimonides believed that all the evil in the world was the product of free will, which allows those who would destroy us to follow the path of their intentions. Does this free will extend to us, so that we have a way of dealing with evil if we choose to do so?

Today, many organisations are trying to inculcate a sense of morality in young people so that the events of the last century are not repeated. But they face an uphill task against fascist organisations, both European and Middle Eastern, that are gaining ground.

I don't believe there is such a thing as Divine Justice. Human justice, yes. But if it's human justice, then there's human injustice too. Perhaps the Divine can help us to stamp it out. That is what I will be hoping for on Monday.

A Vort for Parashat Shemini Rabbi Daniel Goldfarb, CY Faculty

Lev. 11:44-45 tie the warning against defiling ourselves with "swarming things" (*b'chol sheretz ha'romes al ha'aretz*) to the fact that the Lord brought us out of the land of Egypt. The *Kol Omer Kra* (R' Yosef Haim Kra, Poland/Lithuania, 19th C) explained the connection. There are lewts, he said, who are fastidious about not swallowing even the tiniest of gnats, yet at the same time they "swallow **people** like little fish." They subjugate them in all sorts of ways. The verse here is to remind them that the same God who redeemed *bnei Yisrael* from bondage in Egypt will redeem those oppressed in this world from those who exploit and abuse them.

Table Talk

Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, CY Faculty

After 7 days of preparations, Aaron and his sons arrive at the Eighth (Shmini) Day - the final stage of becoming Kohanim. This is the part we are focusing on today. In chapter 11 we receive instructions about pure animals that we may eat.

- 1) The Eighth day is the culmination of a week of preparation for the Kohanim to enter their positions in the Mishkan (tabernacle). At the beginning of the ceremonies, Moshe calls Aaron and his sons, and the elders of the people (9:1). The elders are not mentioned again as doing anything in the Parasha. Why do you think that Moshe called on them to come?
- 2) Aaron is told to bring sacrifices, as are the People of Israel (9:2-4). What is the reason that the people should bring a sacrifice? Might the people have wished to bring a sacrifice because of this event? If yes, why not leave it as a spontaneous activity?
- 3) When it is time to sacrifice, Aaron brings his own sacrifices before sacrificing the people's sacrifices (9:7-21). What would be the logic in this order (especially on this day)?
- 4) At the height of the festivities of the day, Nadav and Avihu, 2 of Aaron's sons die while bringing incense and fire before God (10:1-3). What is Aaron's reaction to the event? What do you think it means?

Later that day, Moshe inquires as to what happened to *Hatat* sacrifices from which