



שמיני - SHMINI

WHAT HAPPENS IN THIS WEEK'S PARSHA?

After a week of inaugurating the **Mishkan**, the Torah tells us about the events of the eight day, **Yom HaShmini**. Moshe gathers Aharon and his sons and the elders of the Jewish people. He tells Aharon to bring a special offering, and to tell the Jewish people that that Hashem will appear to them that day. The Jewish People gather in front of the Mishkan, and watch as Aharon brings his offering and an offering on behalf of the people. Aharon blesses the Jewish people, and Moshe and Aharon go into the Tent of Meeting, the **Ohel Moed**. When they emerge, Hashem's Presence appears to the Jewish people, and the offerings are consumed by fire. Suddenly, Aharon's two older sons, **Nadav** and **Avihu**, bring an offering that was not commanded. A fire consumes them, and they die. Moshe tells Aharon that this tragedy was meant to happen, and Aharon is **silent**. Moshe summons Aharon's cousins, **Mishael** and **Eltzaphan**, to carry their bodies out of the camp. Moshe tells Aharon and his other two sons, **Elazar** and **Itamar**, not to perform any actions of mourning, like tearing their clothes, and not to leave the **Mishkan**; instead, the people will mourn their brothers. Hashem commands Aharon and his sons not to drink any wine when they are working as Cohanim, and to teach the Jewish people the laws of the Torah. Moshe teaches Elazar and Itamar which parts of the offerings they are allowed to eat. Hashem tells Moshe and Aharon to teach the Jewish people about the requirements of **Kosher** animals: a land animal must have split hoofs and chew its cud, and four animals are listed that have one characteristic, but not the other. A water animal must have fins and scales. A list of prohibited birds is given, which are all birds of prey. Insects must walk on four legs and have knees to jump, and no wings. Anyone or anything that touches the corpse of a non-Kosher animal becomes ritually impure until evening, when it is immersed in a ritual pool of water. An earthenware vessel, however, cannot become pure, and must be broken. The body of any kosher animal that died naturally (rather than being slaughtered) also causes ritual impurity. Hashem commands the Jews to maintain a state of ritual purity, because Hashem brought them out of Egypt to be their G-d.

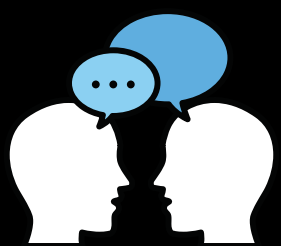
THINK ABOUT IT: After Nadav and Avihu die, Moshe tells Aharon that this event was meant to happen, and Aharon is silent. Do you think that Aharon couldn't speak, or wouldn't speak? What reasons can you think of this response?



NADAV AND AVIHU

The story of Nadav and Avihu's death is short, but raises a lot of questions. You might be wondering: **what exactly were they punished for?** They brought an offering that wasn't commanded during the inauguration of the **Mishkan**, but why did that deserve death? **Rashi** (1040-1105, France) teaches that they taught Torah in front of Moshe, their teacher, or that they entered into the Mishkan while **drunk**, because we are taught the prohibition of working as a Cohen while drunk immediately after this story. **Ibn Ezra** (1089-1167, Spain) focuses on the fact that they brought an offering that **wasn't commanded**, which itself was wrong enough to cause their deaths. Other commentators share different reasons, but they all come down to the same issue: **arrogance**. Since Nadav and Avihu acted **arrogantly**, they were unfit to lead the people spiritually as Cohanim.

וִיקָחוּ בְנֵי אַהֲרֹן נֹדֶב
וְאַבִּיהוּא אִישׁ מִחֶתֶתוֹ
וַיִּתְנוּ בְּהֵן אֵשׁ וַיִּשִׂימוּ
עָלֶיהָ קִטְרֶת וַיִּקְרְבוּ
לִפְנֵי ה' אֵשׁ זָרָה אֲשֶׁר
לֹא צִוָּה אֲתֶם: (ויקרא י:א)
Now Aaron's sons **Nadav and Avihu** each took his fire pan, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered before the L-rd a **strange fire**, which He had not commanded.



DISCUSS:

Consider the explanations of **Rashi** and **Ibn Ezra**. How do they demonstrate arrogance? Why is arrogance such a problematic trait in a leader?



WHY DO JEWS KEEP KOSHER?

Someone might restrict their diet for many reasons: avoiding meat to benefit the environment, avoiding dairy or gluten for health reasons, or avoiding peanuts because of an allergy. The requirement to keep **kosher** is commanded by Hashem, and many people have asked: **What, if anything, is the reason that G-d wants us to keep Kosher?** **Rambam** (1138-1204, Spain & Egypt) explains that a Kosher diet is **healthier**. **Sefer HaChinuch** clarifies that Kosher food is healthier on a **spiritual** level, not necessarily physically, and **Ramban** (1194-1270, Spain & Israel) teaches that the prohibited animals have negative characteristics that Hashem wanted us to avoid consuming. **Rabbi Mordechai Becher** (Present, New York) explains that Kosher restrictions develop our **self-restraint** and **awareness** of the source of our food, not only environmentally, but in the ethics of the animals themselves; for example, there are no Kosher predatory animals. However, the **ultimate** reason for keeping Kosher is simple: **Hashem said to do it, so we do it, even if we don't understand why.**



THINK
What do you think of these explanations? Can you think of any other reasons that Hashem commanded us to keep Kosher?

