

Shemini, which we read this week, is the third *Parashah* in the Book of *Vayikra*, which our Sages call "*Torat Kohanim*" / the laws of the priests. The title "*Torat Kohanim*" aptly describes the earlier *Parashot* in this Book, *Vayikra* and *Tzav*, which discuss the laws of the *Korbanot* / sacrificial offerings, as well as the beginning of this week's *Parashah*, which describes the inauguration of the *Mishkan* / Tabernacle. Likewise, *Parashat Tazria* and most of *Parashat Metzora* discuss laws relevant to the *Kohanim*, as do the beginnings of *Acharei Mot* and *Emor*.

But why, asks R' Nosson Yehuda Leib Mintzberg z"l (1943-2018; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Yerushalayim and Bet Shemesh, Israel) does *Torat Kohanim* also include the identification of kosher animals, birds, and fish (in our *Parashah*), the laws of prohibited relationships (in *Acharei Mot* and *Kedoshim*), the laws of the festivals (*Emor*), and the laws of the *Shemittah* / sabbatical year and other laws of owning land in *Eretz Yisrael* (*Behar* and *Bechukotai*)? What do these laws have to do with *Kohanim*?

R' Mintzberg explains: The word "*Kohanim*" in the title *Torat Kohanim* does not refer only to the priests who are descendants of Aharon Ha'kohen. Rather, we read (*Shmot* 19:6), "You shall be to Me a kingdom of *Kohanim* and a holy nation." The Torah calls all of the Jewish People "*Kohanim*" and holy people, and the laws in *Torat Kohanim* reflect and guard that status. You are holy; therefore, take care what you eat. You are holy; therefore, avoid unholy relationships. You are holy, therefore, observe the festivals, which the Torah (*Vayikra* 23:2) calls "*Mikra'ei Kodosh*" / "holy convocations." You are holy; therefore, you will be given the Holy Land and must observe the laws that guard its holiness. (*Ben Melech, Vayikra* p.117-119)

Shabbat

In the *Gemara* (*Pesachim* 113a), Rabbi Yochanan teaches, "Three people are sure to inherit the World-to-Come: One who dwells in *Eretz Yisrael*, one who raises his children to study Torah, and one who recites *Havdalah* over wine on *Motzai Shabbat*." More specifically, the *Gemara* explains, the third item on Rabbi Yochanan's list refers to a person who saves a little wine from *Kiddush* to be used for *Havdalah*. [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R' Bernard Berzon z"l (1913-1989; rabbi in Brooklyn, N.Y.) writes: The first two items listed are understandable, for there can be no Jewish future without Torah and *Eretz Yisrael*. But the third is extremely puzzling! From early childhood, we are taught that gaining *Olam Ha'ba* requires devoting oneself completely to the service of G-d and man, that it entails a lifetime of meritorious conduct, kindness, and piety. Yet here we seemingly are informed that one can attain immortal life for a few drops of wine that are saved from *Kiddush* for *Havdalah*!

R' Berzon explains: *Kiddush* introduces *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov*. It ushers in moments of spiritual exaltation, when we rise above our daily mundane tasks and become conscious of the *Neshamah Yeteirah*, the "extra" soul that a person receives on *Shabbat*, and of G-d. *Havdalah*, on the other hand, brings us back to "normalcy." It returns us to life's commonplace chores.

More broadly, R' Berzon continues, Rabbi Yochanan uses the term "*Kiddush*" to refer to all moments of exaltation, and *Havdalah* for all day-to-day activity. There are many occasions when we catch a glimpse of the sacred, the true, and the beautiful, when we thrill with deep emotion in response to something higher and nobler than ourselves. But how long do those moments last? If only we could retain a fraction of the joy and inspiration of those rare experiences and incorporate them into our daily lives, if only we could save a few drops of that "*Kiddush*" for "*Havdalah*"--how much better off we would be!

(*RCA Manual of Holiday and Sabbath Sermons* – 5715, p.27)

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Pirkei Avot

“Shimon Ha’tzaddik used to say, ‘The world stands on three things: on Torah study, on the service [of G-d], and on doing kindness.’” (1:2)

“Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says, ‘The world endures on three things: justice, truth, and peace.’” (1:18)

R’ Yitzchak Arieli z”l (1896-1974; *Mashgiach* of Yeshivat Mercaz Harav) writes: The Torah not only teaches a person and helps him develop good *Middot* / character traits, it also draws him close to *Hashem*, which, in turn, enables him to emulate *Hashem’s* ways. Through Torah study, a person can fundamentally change himself such that he develops an inner “*Chen*” (loosely translated, “charm”) and the other characteristics described in *Pirkei Avot*.

R’ Arieli continues: Just as doctors recommend that a person try to keep himself healthy rather than resorting to medicines when he gets sick, so a person should educate himself through Torah study and try to develop good *Middot* before he develops a spiritual “illness.” It is to this goal that Shimon Ha’tzaddik refers when he extols Torah study and other forms of Divine service. As R’ Moshe ben Maimon z”l (*Rambam*; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt) writes: “Most of the laws of the Torah constitute advice from the Great Advisor for repairing one’s beliefs and setting straight one’s deeds.” Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel does not disagree with Shimon Ha’tzaddik. Rather, he addresses the cures that are needed when a person does become spiritually ill: punishments that result from justice and truth and which ultimately lead to peace between men and with G-d.

(*Einayim La’mishpat: Makkot*, Introduction)

R’ Zerachiah Gutah z”l (1590-1648; rabbi in Turkey, Yerushalayim, and Egypt) writes: Shimon Ha’tzaddik identifies the three pillars that hold up the “building,” so-to-speak--Torah, Divine service, and kindness. However, just as the pillars in the *Mishkan* needed *Berichim* / crossbars to hold them up, so the three pillars on which the world stands need “nails” to strengthen them--justice, truth, and peace.

(*Zerach Rav*)

R’ Yitzchak Berachiah Sangoiniti z”l (Italy; 18th century) writes: Shimon Ha’tzaddik lived while the *Bet Hamikdash* stood, when Torah study, the sacrificial service, and kindness were widespread. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, in contrast, lived long after the destruction of the Temple. He saw that once the Temple no longer stood, the Jewish People had three different merits that permitted the world to endure: justice, truth, and peace.

(*Zechut Avot*)

“Moshe and Aharon came to the *Ohel Mo’ed* / Tent of Meeting, and they went out and they blessed the people.” (9:23)

Rashi z”l writes: They blessed them with the words (*Tehilim* 90:17), “May the pleasantness of *Hashem*, our *Elokim*, be upon us; our handiwork, establish for us; our handiwork, establish it.” (This is one of the chapters of *Tehilim* that Moshe Rabbeinu authored, as the introductory words of the psalm state: “A prayer by Moshe . . .”)

Why is the purpose of the seemingly redundant wording: “Our handiwork, establish for us; our handiwork, establish it”? R’ Tzvi Abba Gorelick z”l (*Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshiva Gedolah Zichron Moshe in South Fallsburg, N.Y.; died 2010) explains:

The *Gemara* (*Ta’anit* 5a) teaches: “*Hashem* said, ‘I will not enter Yerushalayim above until I come to Yerushalayim below,’” as we read (*Hoshea* 11:9), “The Holy One is in your midst, and I will not enter a city.” (Commentaries explain that *Hashem* created everything for the specific purpose of revealing His *Shechinah*/ Presence within our “lower” world. Thus, as long as the *Bet Hamikdash* is not standing and His *Shechinah* is not revealed fully in our world, His goal is frustrated, so He is not fully revealed in the world above either.) It follows, writes R’ Gorelick, that when the *Mishkan* was completed and the *Shechinah* rested within it, *Hashem* was revealed above as well. Thus we read (*Shmot* 39:32), “All the work of the *Mishkan*, the *Ohel Mo’ed*, was completed, and *Bnei Yisrael* had done everything that *Hashem* commanded Moshe, so did they do”--they had done everything that *Hashem* had commanded in building the *Mishkan* on earth, and “so did they do” in “building” the *Mishkan* in the Heavens. And, concludes R’ Gorelick, this explains as well the redundancy in Moshe’s prayer: “Our handiwork, establish for us”--refers to the physical *Mishkan* on earth; “Our handiwork, establish it”--refers to the Heavenly *Mishkan*.

(*Pirkei Mikra: Parashat Pekudei* #5)

“Moshe heard, and it was good in his eyes.” (10:20)

R’ Shlomo Kluger z”l (1785-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) explains: After Nadav and Avihu died, Moshe instructed Aharon and his sons Elazar and Itamar (10:6), “Do not leave your heads unshorn and do not rend your garments”--*i.e.*, do not mourn. Instead, they were to joyously carry on with the dedication of the *Mishkan*, as the *Gemara* (*Berachot* 54a) instructs: “A person is obligated to bless G-d for bad tidings just as he blesses Him for good tidings.” Human nature is, however, that a person who is feeling mental anguish cannot think clearly and logically. Therefore, when Moshe heard Aharon’s cogent argument for why one of the sacrifices should be burnt and not eaten (see verses 16-19), Moshe knew that Aharon was in full control of his emotions, and it was “good in his eyes.” (*Imrei Shefer*)