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**Rav Avigdor Miller on**

**Post-Purim Lessons**



**QUESTION: Now that Purim is over, what are we supposed to think?**

**ANSWER**: Ahh, the age old question: What will be left after Purim? What packages are we taking with us after Purim? On Purim, over here, we sang*"Ah gantz yahr freilich"*and we added in the words*"Ah gantz yahr Purim."*

Because the wise man uses his Purim, he puts his mind to all the lessons of Purim, and the day of Purim makes his whole year *freilich*. His whole year becomes a Purim. Not only *ah* *gantz yahr freilich,*but all your life becomes *Purimdik*.

And one of the biggest *simchos* is the recognition that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is ישראל עמו אוהב. That's the second *yesod*, the second foundation, of the whole Torah.

The first *yesod* is that Hashem made the world, the whole world is nothing but the *dvar Hashem*. That's the first *yesod* of the Torah. And the second *yesod*, right on the heels of the first one, is that Hashem loves His people. The whole Torah, the whole Tanach, talks only about ישראל עמו. And that's a great happiness when you know that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is thinking about you.

Not about the Am Yisroel in general - He's thinking about **you**! You see this man sitting here? Hakodosh Boruch Hu is thinking about him. Hakodosh Boruch Hu says, "That's My son!" Hakodosh Boruch Hu loves us more than parents love their children. The love that a mother has for her children is nothing compared to the way Hashem loves each one of us.

And since Hashem loves us so much, that's the happiness in life. There's no happiness like that. The greatest *simcha* is that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is ישראל עמו אוהב. That's the true *simcha*, and that *simcha* remains all year round. And that's the lesson that you study all day on Purim and then you take it with you all year long.

So let's think about that for a minute before we say goodbye to Purim. Hashem is looking at us right now, and He's thinking, "Ah, I have *nachas* from you, My children. I love you *My tyierah kinderlach."*

*Reprinted from the March 22, 2019 email of Toras Avigdor. Adapted from the last moments of Rav Miller’s Purim Mesibah (Party) on March 23, 1997.*

**The Shmuz on****Parshas Shemini**

**Primed for Spiritual Perfection**

**By Rabbi Bentzion Shafier**

**Founder of TheShmuz.com**

*“For I am HASHEM your G-d — you are to sanctify yourselves and you shall become holy, for I am holy; and you shall not make your souls impure through any creeping things that creeps on the earth.”* — *Vayikra* 11:44

The Torah seems to be connecting holiness with not eating impure food. Rabbeinu Bechaye explains that this is the Torah system for spiritual growth. By keeping the mitzvosin general and by not eating forbidden foods specifically, the desires in man become weaker and his *seichel* becomes stronger. Thereby, he becomes holy.

This concept is very difficult to understand. Controlling one’s desires is a fine notion, but how does that make a person sacred? It may stop him from becoming a hedonist, but it won’t make him holy.



**Rabbi Bentzion Shafier**

**The Nature of Man**

The answer to this question is based on a more focused understanding of human nature.

The *Chovos HaLevavos* (*Sha’ar Avodas Elokim* 3:2) explains: When HASHEM created man, He joined two distinct elements to form his living soul. These are his spiritual soul (what we call his *neshamah*) and his animal soul. The conscious “I” that thinks and feels is made up of both parts. The *neshamah* comes from under the throne of HASHEM’s glory. It is pure and lofty, holy and sublime. All that it wishes for is that which is good, proper, and noble. Because it comes from the upper worlds, it derives no benefit from this world and can’t relate to any of its pleasures. The other part of man’s soul is very different. It is exactly like that of an animal, with all of the passions and desires necessary to keep it alive. That is his animal soul.

An animal has a living essence. Just like man, it has a part that isn’t physical, but spiritual. It is attracted toward certain types of objects and repelled by others. A dog, for example, will form attachments to its master and will even risk its own life to defend him. But when the dog sleeps, its body lies there flat and almost lifeless. When it wakes up, its essence comes back again. That part of the animal, its inner essence, is its animal soul.

HASHEM implanted into the animal soul all of the drives it will need for its survival. A cat hunts mice by instinct. A bird eats worms because of an inner urge. Those instincts and hungers are part of the animal soul.

Man also has an animal soul. There is a part of him that yearns for physical things. He desires to eat, sleep, and procreate. HASHEM put into man’s animal soul all of the inclinations he needs to stay alive. If he follows these instincts, he will survive, and the species of mankind will continue.

**The Fight in Man**

These two elements of man are opposites and are competing for primacy. Each vies for control over the person. As a result, man is in constant flux. The more he uses one side, the stronger and more influential it becomes. Much like a muscle that becomes stronger with use and atrophies with disuse, if a person uses his spiritual soul to control his animal soul, it becomes stronger, and he becomes elevated.

If he gives in to his desires, then the animal soul gains command. His desires become more intense and frequent. They demand to be fulfilled more often and with more force until man becomes controlled by his drives.

Life is a battle between these two forces. Ideally, if a person succeeds completely, his pure intellectual soul will harness his animal soul and use it for the purpose of keeping himself alive. However, if a person allows his animal desires to win and he follows their natural pull without controlling them, they will become stronger and eventually rule over him.

**In Fine Balance**

Most of the mitzvos of the Torah are based on maintaining a fine balance in the two sides of a human. Because these two parts of man, the *neshamah* and the animal soul, are at war, the Torah forbids certain activities because they give an unfair advantage to the animal soul. They strengthen it and give it extra force. Just as too much caffeine causes people to be jittery, anxious, and short-tempered, certain foods affect our spiritual balance. When meat and milk are cooked together, the combination strengthens the animal soul of man.

To understand how it does that, you would need to be a scientist of the soul. That law is called a *chok* because the average person isn’t schooled enough in spirituality to understand how it works. But the Torah warns us against this combination because it has the effect of making the animal soul more powerful and primary.

The Gemara (*Yoma* 39) tells us that *treif* food deadens the heart of man. When a person eats forbidden foods, it becomes more difficult for him to feel the holiness of Shabbos, to learn Torah, and to feel another person’s pain. Why is this? Because in that fine balance of his personality, the animal soul has been strengthened, and by consequence, his *neshamah* is weakened. The person becomes more animal-like and less G-d-like. And now, it is more difficult for him to relate to spiritual matters.

**A Pull to Holiness**

This seems to be the answer to the question on the Rabbeinu Bechaye. Within man, HASHEM implanted a *neshamah* so pure that it pulls him to greatness. Its only desire is to be as much like HASHEM as it can be. HASHEM is perfect. HASHEM is holy. And so, man’s *neshamah* pulls toward perfection, toward becoming as holy as a human can be.

The difficulty with man reaching this state is that his animal soul tugs him toward everything temporal and passing. Its desires are immediate and mundane — the opposite of all that is holy and sublime. The more that man gives in to these desires, the stronger their pull on him. If left unchecked, they would turn him into an animal in the form of a man. So the Torah warns us against these activities that will prevent us from attaining a true state of holiness.

**In Our Lives**

This concept is particularly relevant because the Torah is teaching us that being holy isn’t foreign to us. Quite the opposite, it is part of our very nature. Half of our personality only wishes for that which is elevated and proper. If we listen to that side, we will be holy. The difficulty is that there is another half of us blocking the way to that state. To grow, we have to resist its call and stand up against its pull.

Each of the mitzvos guides us toward perfection. Do this, and your *neshamah* will shine. Don’t do that because it will sully you and make it more difficult for you to actualize your potential.

Holiness is inborn in us. All we need to do is use the system to bring it out. When we do, we fulfill the reason for Creation and our purpose for being put into this world. We become more like HASHEM; we become holy.

*Reprinted from this week’s website on TheShmuz.com This is an excerpt from the [Shmuz on the Parsha book](https://theshmuz.com/product/shmuz-on-the-parsha-book/).*

**The Osprey and the**

**Lesson of Divine Providence**

**From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



The osprey, a large type of hawk, is one of the non-kosher birds listed in this week's Torah portion, Shemini. The osprey, which lives on a diet of fish, is an expert fisherman, swooping down into the depths of the sea to catch its prey.

The Talmud relates that Rabbi Yochanan considered the osprey an outstanding example of Divine Providence. Whenever he saw an osprey feeding he would recite the verse, "Your judgements are the greatest depths." G-d oversees and supervises His world even in the very depths of the sea. Rabbi Yochanan saw that the osprey is only an instrument for G-d's judgement, eating precisely those fish which G-d has decreed should be eaten.

Rabbi Yochanan's statement is similar in content to the Baal Shem Tov's teaching, that everything that happens in the world is due to Divine Providence. G-d not only directs the steps of man, but oversees the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms, guiding every tiny detail of His world.

The Baal Shem Tov taught that every single phenomenon that occurs is determined by G-d, even the path of a falling leaf and the course it takes as the wind blows it about.

The example set by the osprey is also, therefore, not accidental, for it teaches us a lesson about how G-d oversees His creation. Although it often seems to us that the world operates only according to natural law, and it is sometimes difficult to detect the hand of G-d "behind the scenes."

Chasidic philosophy offers us an unusual insight. The Hebrew word for "nature"--"teva"--comes from the same root as the word meaning "drowned," or "sunken." Just as sunken treasure, hidden beneath the depths of the sea, continues to exist despite being invisible to the naked eye, so too, does nature obscure the true reality within. The laws of nature conceal the Divine Providence that directs every physical phenomenon, making it appear as if events just happen by themselves.

The osprey teaches us that if we want to uncover the truth which the laws of nature conceal, all we need do is dive beneath the surface to uncover the Divine Providence which is in control.

When we look beyond the obvious and contemplate these things, we come to the realization that there is no such thing as an accident. This fact will be made eminently clear after the coming of Moshiach, when the G-dliness hidden within the physical realm will be revealed and open for all to see.

*Reprinted from the Parashat Shemini 5753/1993 edition of L’Chaim Weekly (Issue #263), a publication of the Lubavitch Youth Organization in Brooklyn, NY.*

**Rabbi Berel Wein**

**On Parashat Shemini**

We are all aware that personal disappointments and tragedies are unavoidable events in the life span of human beings. No one departs from this world unscathed by difficulties. In the Torah reading of this week we are informed of the death of the two elder sons of Aaron. The Torah ascribes their deaths to the fact that they offered up a strange fire on the altar in the process of burning the holy incense.

The commentators to the Torah over the ages have searched for an understanding of what their sin was and how the punishment fit the crime. It would be no exaggeration to state that in spite of these valiant scholarly efforts, the entire incident is still shrouded in mystery and beyond ordinary rational understanding.

Because of this, the Torah itself, almost cryptically, accepts Aaron’s reaction of silence as being a correct and appropriate reaction to this tragedy. One would therefore be led to believe that this tragic moment in the life of Aaron and his family marked the end of his public career and his service to the Jewish people. It would apparently be understandable to many if Aaron had simply retired and left the priesthood for others to service and administer.



**Rabbi Berel Wein**

I think that this is part of the message why the Torah emphasizes that all of this took place on the eighth day. The eighth day is always representative of continuity in Jewish life. It is the day of circumcision and it is the day when the seven-day period of mourning is over. The eighth day looks to the future and is always seen as a day of recovery and rejuvenation.

The history of the Jewish people, just as is true in the lives of individuals, has many instances of tragedy and disappointment. Yet the overall impression that Jewish history should leave with those who study it, is the great resilience that our story represents. Our story is one of the eighth day and not merely of the seven days of mourning and sadness.

Aaron and his descendants are remembered and revered until today for their continual blessings and service to the Jewish people, both in Temple times and thereafter. Rising from his personal tragedy, Aaron becomes the most beloved of Jewish leaders and the symbol of harmony, tolerance and true piety for all time.

The rabbis of the Mishnah encouraged us all to become students and disciples of Aaron and to emulate his ways and attitudes. We are to appreciate his silence in reaction to tragedy and to be inspired by his resilience and continuity in public service in spite of his personal loss and grief. This is a lesson that is true for us not only on a personal scale but on a national one as well.

The last century has been a tragic one for the Jewish people. But it has proven to be a time of great resilience and untold accomplishment. We should always remember that no matter what our situation may be today we will always attempt to live and be successful on the eighth day.

*Reprinted from this week’s website of Rabbiwein.com*

**The Importance**

**Of Preparation**

**Rabbi Eli J. Mansour**



Parashat Shemini begins with the Pasuk, ‘VaYehi Bayom HaShemini’, literally meaning, ‘and it was on the eighth day’. The Torah tells us that this eighth day was actually the first day that the Mishkan was opened for business. The question is asked as to why the Torah refers to this first day as the eighth day. Seemingly, the Pasuk should open up and say ‘VaYehi Bayom HaRishon.’

Rav David Feinstein, son of Rav Moshe Feinstein, gives an interesting insight on this. Rav Feinstein points out that from here we learn that in the Jewish religion, preparing for a Mitzvah is of great importance and itself has value. The seven days prior to the eighth day when the Mishkan opened, were the days that Moshe Rabbeinu worked with others to prepare the Mishkan.

The Torah is teaching us here that it is not only the Mitzvah that has value.  The preparation for the Mitzvah also has value.  Preparation for Tefilah, or preparation for Shabbat, or preparation for Mikveh, are all themselves full of value even though the act itself is not the Mitzvah.

In this Parasha we read how Moshe Rabbeinu worked preparing the Mishkan for seven days.  Those days should not be disregarded or unnoticed. The Torah is emphasizing the importance of the prior seven days when it says ‘VaYehi Bayom HaShemini’.  Preparation is important and has value. We must prepare for our Mitzvot and not jump into them haphazardly.

Now, as we enter the season of Pesach, let us prepare properly. Do not wait for the last minute. Make sure to prepare the proper size cup for the four cups of wine. Make sure to buy the Matzah in advance. Clean appropriately and don’t wait for the last minute. There is value in preparation for a Mitzvah. Hence, ‘Vayehi Bayom HaShemini’.

*Reprinted from this week’s website of the Edmund J. Safra Synagogue in Brooklyn, NY.*

**A Blast from the Recent Past (2015)**

**The Power of Good Women**

**By Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss**



As I get ready once again to accept power of attorney to sell people chometz,, let me share with you the following memory. Several years ago when “facilitating the sale of chometz”, I had a remarkable discussion with one of mymispallelim.

While we were talking, I discovered that this would be his fourth opportunity to say Birchas HaChamah.  In 1925, he was twelve years old - and now as he gets ready to bless the sun the fourth time, he is in his 95thyear - may he live to greet the Moshiach.

As we were talking, I asked him if he remembers what the Great Depression was like.  He answered in the affirmative and related to me that life in Brownsville, Brooklyn, in the late 1920s and 1930s was very difficult indeed.  He remembered how his father was a carpenter and would not have regular work.

Rather, he would take his heavy toolbox on his shoulder early each morning and trek to a worksite where he would stand in line together with many other hopeful carpenters, hoping to have a chance to be chosen for a day’s work.  The foreman would select a few fortunate individuals and everyone else was sent home in disappointment.

This man said that he remembered, as a young man, the shining wisdom of his mother.  Afraid that his father might fall into a depression when he came home dispirited for not being selected to work, she would set out a nice table and offer reviving food to lift his spirits. He recalled that she would buy a box of rotten apples (for this was all that they could afford!) and cut away the bad parts and then wondrously manufacture apple strudel, apple cake, candied apples, and a host of other delicacies.

I told him that this wisdom of his virtuous mother, zichrona levracha, is taught to us in the Meam Loez on Parshas Ki Tzaittzay.  There, the Meam Loez informs us that the true sign of an Eishes Chayil, a Woman of Valor, is how she behaves when her husband is out of work.

This story got me thinking about our present situation a little less than a century later.  As we are reeling from an economic meltdown and suffering through a deep recession, many, many homes are today also facing such challenges.

While most of us do not have to buy rotten apples, the problems are of a different nature.  The worries about bank foreclosures on homes and cars, utilities being shut down, medical coverage being lost, and tuition not being met, causes the heads of households sleepless nights, stomach agitation, and all different types of stress related ailments.  It is here that I would like especially my women readership to absorb the sage words of the Meam Loez: that, in these times of tension, their status of Eishes Chayil is truly put to the test.

As I am writing this, I know that the almost instant reaction, especially of the American reader, is, “Wait, just one minute!  Why are you putting this on the women?  The men should equally be there for all of the stress that the women have because of today’s economy!”  So, let me explain.  As we remember the Pesach experience, the Medrash teaches, “She’b'zuchus noshim tzidkonios she’b'oso hador, nigalu - In the merit of the righteous women of that generation, we were saved.”

Besides the several extraordinary women that this refers to, such as Yocheved, Miriam, Tziporah, Bisya, and Elisheva, it is also a sweeping statement of praise about the millions of Jewish women in Egypt who, with great courage, encouraged their husbands to continue building Jewish families.  The Medrash tells us that the men became broken and crushed and weren’t interested in having more children.  They argued, Should we bring children into such a world to be crushed in the walls of Pitom and Ramses or to be faced with a horrible existence of tortuous slavery?

The women, however, with wise optimism, rejuvenated their husbands under the apple tress (which we commemorate at the Seder with the eating of charoses) and infused them with new hope to continue to build Klal Yisroel.  It was their valor that allowed for the increased Jewish population that Chazal teach us, enabled the years of servitude to end more quickly.

You might argue that the women in Mitzrayim had it easier than the men and that was why they were able to cope better.  But, in reality, it is just the opposite.  The Medrash tells us that part of Paroh’s diabolical treatment of the Jews was that he gave the men women’s work to do, and men’s work to the women.  So, the women were actually doing the hard labor formerly associated with men.  Yet, it didn’t break their spirits.  To the contrary, they persevered and took the initiative to rekindle the hope and spirit of their families.

This is a very important point that needs to be emphasized as we experience Pesach this year.  The women have to take the initiative in bolstering their husband’s confidence in seeking ways to be a calming influence in the home, a source of comfort after the harsh realities of a tough and oftentimes cruel workplace.

Our history teaches us, time and time again, good women throughout the ages, have the strength to do this.  While we do not have to buy rotten apples, women do have to figure out ways to cut down on household expenses, minimize use of credit cards, and set the tone for this behavior for the entire family.

In the merit of all the wonderful women out there, may we all be blessed with long life, good health, and everything wonderful.

*Reprinted from the March 10, 2015 website of Matzav.com*

**The Very Strange Opinion**

**Of the Baal Halachos Gedolos**

**By Rabbi David Ashear**



If any individual was compiling a minyan on mitzvos they are counting the 613 mitzvos. Undoubtedly Emunah b'Hashem, to believe in HK"BH as creator of the world, as the master of the universe, would be right there at the top of the 613 mitzvos. When looking at the Rambam in the Sefer Hamitzvos that's exactly where it is, of course, one of the 613 mitzvos right at the beginning, is Emunah b'Hashem - to believe in Hashem. אנכי ה' אלקיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים.

It's strangely, the Baal Halachos Gedolos, the BaH"aG, when he compiles his list of 613 mitzvos he leaves Emunah b'Hashem, believing in Hashem, off his list. How can that be? How can Emunah not make the top 613? Shaatnez makes the cut, Yibum makes the cut, but believing in Hashem, how could that not be in the 613 mitzvos?

Comes along the Ramban and the Ramban, in his sefer Hasogos on the Ramabam's Sefer Hamitvos, he explains the Shita of the BaH"aG and why the BaH"aG  leaves Emunah b'Hashem off his counting of the 613 mitzvos.

The Ramban explains that believing in Hashem, according to the BaH"aG, can't just be a one of 613 because believing in Hashem is the foundation of all 613. To believe in Hashem is the reason why I keep every single mitzva. Why do I put in Teffilin every single morning? Because I believe in Hashem and believe in His Torah.

Why do I daven? Why do I learn? Why do I dress b'Tznius? Because I believe in Hashem and I'm trying to get closer to Hashem and I'm trying to serve Hashem. But the foundation of every single mitzva and the core of every single mitzva is that I believe in Hashem.

So therefore, the BaH"aG felt, I can't include Emuanh b'Hashem as one of 613 mitzvos, as it's the primary reason, it's the foundation of every single mitzva. It's so much bigger, it's holding all 613 mitzvos up and therefore it's not one of because it's bigger than all of them.

Each and every one of us needs to understand how important Emunah b'Hashem is. And Emunah b'Hashem can't just be a concept that when asked 'yes it's true, I believe.' It has to be in our hearts, it has to be in our minds, every single moment, that I believe in Hashem. We have to work on Emunah b'Hashem.

The more Emunah we have the more Chashuv my Avodat Hashem is going to be, the more special the mitzvos that I perform for Hashem is going to be because it's the foundation for every single mitzva. And the more I believe in Hashem, the more I am thinking about Hashem, the more passion I am going to put into my service of HK"BH. It will change my entire life as an Eved Hashem if I truly am steeped in Emunah every moment of our life.

Let's realize it's the foundation of all. It's not just one of but it's the primary basis for כל התורה כולו and I will be a completely different Jew, a completely different person if I have more Emunah in my life, if I build Emunah in my life. And let's make sure we are working on building tremendous Emunah, tremendous belief in Hashem, every single moment of our life.

Reprinted from the March 26, 2019 email of Emunah Daily.

## Thoughts that Count

*And it came to pass on the eighth day that Moses called Aaron and his sons, and the elders of Israel* (Lev. 9:1)

Every day, Aaron, his sons, and the elders came to learn Torah from Moses without having to be called. Why, on this day, did Moses have to call them? Proverbs states, "The heart knows the bitterness of the soul." The Talmud explains that a person may have a premonition about something without being consciously aware of it.

Aaron and the elders felt, in their hearts, that on that day -- the eighth day of the consecration of the Tabernacle -- a terrible calamity would befall the Jewish nation. Indeed, later that day, Aaron's two sons were killed. Moses therefore found it necessary to seek them out and urge them to come. *(Rabbi Shlomo Kluger)*

Reprinted from Issue of #263 of L’Chaim Weekly (Parshat Shemini 5753/1993.

**The Mysterious Life and Death of Nadab and**

**Abihu, Sons of Aaron**

**By Rabbi** [**Levi Avtzon**](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/15836/jewish/Avtzon-Levi.htm)



*They brought what Moses commanded before the Tabernacle of Meeting, and all the congregation drew near and stood before G-d* (Lev. 9:5)

According to the Kabbalist Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, the commandment to love one's fellow Jew must be accepted before beginning to pray. Only when "the congregation drew near" to each other in love and unity, did the Jewish people "stand before G-d" in prayer and supplication. *(Chesed L'Avraham)*

*Among the cud-chewing, hoofed animals, these are the ones that you may not eat: the camel...the hyrax..the hare..the pig.* (Lev. 11:4-7)

The Torah lists four animals that have only one of the two kosher signs and are therefore non-kosher--camel, hyrax, hare and pig. Each animal symbolizes one of the four nations which enslaved the Jews in exile. We are now in the last of these four exiles, corresponding to the pig--chazir in Hebrew. The word "chazir" means "return." After this fourth and final exile the glory of the Jewish people will "return" to the way it was intended. *(Vayikra Raba)*

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Reprinted from Issue of #263 of L’Chaim Weekly (Parshat Shemini 5753/1993.

Nadab and Abihu are mentioned briefly in Scripture as two men who came too close to G‑dand died in the Tabernacle under mysterious circumstances.

Here’s what we know from the biblical text.

Aaron and his wife Elisheba had four sons: Nadab, Abihu, Elazar and Itamar.[1](javascript:doFootnote('1a4321414');) The two older brothers are always mentioned as a unit, and we explore them accordingly.

When Moses ascended the mountain at [the Revelation at Sinai](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3514990/jewish/What-Happened-at-Matan-Torah.htm), G‑d specified that Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the 70 elders would also come (partway) up Mount Sinai and prostrate themselves from afar.[2](javascript:doFootnote('2a4321414');) Note that these two sons were singled out by G‑d, while their two younger brothers were not.

**Their Deaths**

Although we are introduced to Nadab and Abihu earlier in Torah, there is not much information given about them in the actual text—until the enigmatic description of their untimely deaths.

It was the [1st of Nissan, 2449](https://www.chabad.org/calendar/view/day_cdo/aid/225033/jewish/Mishkan-completed.htm), just one short year after the Exodus. [The Mishkan](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2133493/jewish/What-Was-the-Mishkan-Tabernacle.htm), the portable Tabernacle, was finally ready. G‑d had commanded the Jews to build a home for Him. And now, after an eventful year of the Giving of the Torah, [the Golden Calf](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3613047/jewish/What-Was-the-Golden-Calf.htm), [the first Yom Kippur](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/177886/jewish/What-Is-Yom-Kippur.htm) and many other episodes, the Jews were ready to inaugurate a home for the Divine. For a week, Aaron and his four sons had remained at the entrance of the Tabernacle night and day,[3](javascript:doFootnote('3a4321414');) undergoing a whole string of ceremonies and procedures as a prerequisite for their service in the Mishkan.[4](javascript:doFootnote('4a4321414');)

Now the big day had arrived:[5](javascript:doFootnote('5a4321414');) On the 8th day of the inauguration, the first official day of service in the Tabernacle, Aaron and his sons followed a very special ritual designed by G‑d. Everything seemed to be going beautifully. But then the unimaginable occurred:

And Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, each took his pan, put fire in them, and placed incense upon it, and they brought before the L‑rd foreign fire, which He had not commanded them. And fire went forth from before the L‑rd and consumed them, and they died before the L‑rd.

Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the L‑rd spoke, [when He said], 'I will be sanctified through those near to Me, and before all the people I will be glorified.' " And Aaron was silent.[6](javascript:doFootnote('6a4321414');)

On their very first day of service, Nadab and Abihu brought a “foreign fire” and were tragically consumed. On a simple level, this means that they brought a fire of their own, which G‑d had not commanded, into the sanctuary.

**The Sages on Nadab and Abihu**

At first glance, Nadab and Abihu appear to be transgressors who didn’t listen to the word of G‑d and were punished as a result. And perhaps that is true.

But the commentaries and Midrashim paint a very different picture of Nadab and Abihu, as well as the circumstances surrounding their death:

Their piety was on par with the greatest of the great, Moses and Aaron![7](javascript:doFootnote('7a4321414');)

They were “clean from sin” (up until the sin that caused their untimely death).[8](javascript:doFootnote('8a4321414');)

They were extremely handsome physically, which reflected a beautiful soul within[9](javascript:doFootnote('9a4321414');)

After their death, G‑d turned to Moses and said, “Tell Aaron, your brother, that I have done a great kindness and honor to him by the death of his children Nadab and Abihu, for now I have placed him in the innermost chamber, even closer to Me than you, Moses.”[10](javascript:doFootnote('10a4321414');)

G‑d treasured them, and thus their death is mentioned many times in the Torah.[11](javascript:doFootnote('11a4321414');)

G‑d instructed that all the Jews mourn their death.[12](javascript:doFootnote('12a4321414');)

They were reincarnations of the positive elements of Cain (son of Adam and Eve).[13](javascript:doFootnote('13a4321414');)

**Nobody Is Perfect**

So what went wrong? How did such special individuals end up dying what may be the most tragic of deaths in the Bible?[14](javascript:doFootnote('14a4321414');)

According to many commentaries, it wasn’t the foreign fire itself that was the cause of their death; rather, Nadab and Abihu were being punished for other infractions. However, it’s important to note that their actions were only considered sinful relative to their level of greatness.

Here are some perspectives on what exactly Nadab and Abihu did wrong:

Being Disrespectful. One should not render judgment in front of his teacher. Nadab and Abihu did so in front of their teacher Moses, ruling that it was a mitzvah for them to bring their own fire to the altar.[15](javascript:doFootnote('15a4321414');)

Drinking on the Job. Caught up in the excitement of the moment, the two entered the Tabernacle while inebriated. This explains why this episode is followed by an admonishment not to serve in the Tabernacle while drunk.[16](javascript:doFootnote('16a4321414');)

Staying Celibate. They never married, and remaining single for no good reason is a sin. Many single women were hoping to marry them, but Nadab and Abihu would say, “The brother of our father [Moses] is a king, the brother of our mother [[Nachshon](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2199147/jewish/Nachshon-ben-Aminadav-The-Man-Who-Jumped-Into-the-Sea.htm" \o "Nachshon ben Aminadav: The Man Who Jumped Into the Sea)] is a prince, our father [Aaron] is the High Priest, and we are the two vice high priests—which woman is good enough for us?”[17](javascript:doFootnote('17a4321414');)

Behaving Casually Before the Divine. When G‑d revealed Himself at Sinai, they acted too casually by eating, drinking and staring at the Divine as if they were looking at a friend.[18](javascript:doFootnote('18a4321414');)

Seeking Power. Once, Moses and Aaron were walking down the road, and Nadab and Abihu were walking behind them. Nadab turned to Abihu and said, “When will these two elders die, so that you and I can lead the generation?” G‑d heard this and said, “Let us see who will bury whom!”[19](javascript:doFootnote('19a4321414');)

Not Seeking Advice. They were too self-assured and didn’t seek counsel or advice from Moses, Aaron or even each other.[20](javascript:doFootnote('20a4321414');)

Other commentaries strongly believe that their sin was of a higher nature than any of the abovementioned infractions. For example, the Kli Yakar says that he does not find a basis for any of these “sins” in the text of the Torah itself.[21](javascript:doFootnote('21a4321414');) On the contrary, from the verse “And they brought foreign fire before G‑d, that which they weren’t commanded to,” it seems clear that their only sin was that of the “foreign fire.”

There is a famous explanation from the Holy Ohr Hachaim[22](javascript:doFootnote('22a4321414');) which is also brought in many [Chassidic](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/42633/jewish/Withdrawal-and-Return.htm)texts that Aaron's two sons did not “sin” literally. Their “sin” was allowing their desire to cleave to G‑d to become so intense that their bodies could no longer contain their souls, and they expired. Thus, the Torah says, “They drew near to the L‑rd [with such passion that] they died.”

This was considered a sin, for although a Jew must divest himself of material concerns and focus on spirituality, at the moment when the ultimate ecstasy of the soul is within his grasp, he must return to the work that the soul is meant to do within a physical existence.

We were sent to this world to impact it and transform it, and not to escape it. We must uncover the holiness within our lives.

**FOOTNOTES**

[1.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4321414/jewish/The-Mysterious-Life-and-Death-of-Nadab-and-Abihu-Sons-of-Aaron.htm" \l "footnoteRef1a4321414) [Exodus 6:23](https://www.chabad.org/9867#v23).

[2.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4321414/jewish/The-Mysterious-Life-and-Death-of-Nadab-and-Abihu-Sons-of-Aaron.htm" \l "footnoteRef2a4321414) [Exodus 24:1](https://www.chabad.org/9885#v1) and 9.

[3.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4321414/jewish/The-Mysterious-Life-and-Death-of-Nadab-and-Abihu-Sons-of-Aaron.htm" \l "footnoteRef3a4321414) [Leviticus 8:35](https://www.chabad.org/9909#v35).

[4.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4321414/jewish/The-Mysterious-Life-and-Death-of-Nadab-and-Abihu-Sons-of-Aaron.htm" \l "footnoteRef4a4321414) See [Leviticus 8:5](https://www.chabad.org/9909#v5) and onwards.

[5.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4321414/jewish/The-Mysterious-Life-and-Death-of-Nadab-and-Abihu-Sons-of-Aaron.htm" \l "footnoteRef5a4321414) As detailed in Leviticus 9.

[6.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4321414/jewish/The-Mysterious-Life-and-Death-of-Nadab-and-Abihu-Sons-of-Aaron.htm" \l "footnoteRef6a4321414) Leviticus 10.

[7.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4321414/jewish/The-Mysterious-Life-and-Death-of-Nadab-and-Abihu-Sons-of-Aaron.htm" \l "footnoteRef7a4321414) Zohar Chadash III 61b.

[8.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4321414/jewish/The-Mysterious-Life-and-Death-of-Nadab-and-Abihu-Sons-of-Aaron.htm" \l "footnoteRef8a4321414) Vayikra Rabbah 20:8.

[9.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4321414/jewish/The-Mysterious-Life-and-Death-of-Nadab-and-Abihu-Sons-of-Aaron.htm" \l "footnoteRef9a4321414) Targum Yonatan to [Exodus 24:11](https://www.chabad.org/9885#v11).

[10.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4321414/jewish/The-Mysterious-Life-and-Death-of-Nadab-and-Abihu-Sons-of-Aaron.htm" \l "footnoteRef10a4321414) Pesikta Rabbati 47:14.

[11.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4321414/jewish/The-Mysterious-Life-and-Death-of-Nadab-and-Abihu-Sons-of-Aaron.htm" \l "footnoteRef11a4321414) Bamidbar Rabbah 2:23.

[12.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4321414/jewish/The-Mysterious-Life-and-Death-of-Nadab-and-Abihu-Sons-of-Aaron.htm" \l "footnoteRef12a4321414) [Leviticus 10:6](https://www.chabad.org/9911#v6).

[13.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4321414/jewish/The-Mysterious-Life-and-Death-of-Nadab-and-Abihu-Sons-of-Aaron.htm" \l "footnoteRef13a4321414) [Nadab and Abihu](https://www.chabad.org/kabbalah/article_cdo/aid/1617362/jewish/Nadab-Abihu-332a.htm).

[14.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4321414/jewish/The-Mysterious-Life-and-Death-of-Nadab-and-Abihu-Sons-of-Aaron.htm" \l "footnoteRef14a4321414) Tragic in so many ways. This was supposed to be Aaron’s greatest day of his life when he officially assumed his role as the first High Priest of the Jewish people.

[15.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4321414/jewish/The-Mysterious-Life-and-Death-of-Nadab-and-Abihu-Sons-of-Aaron.htm" \l "footnoteRef15a4321414) Talmud, Eiruvin 63a.

[16.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4321414/jewish/The-Mysterious-Life-and-Death-of-Nadab-and-Abihu-Sons-of-Aaron.htm" \l "footnoteRef16a4321414) This reason and the one above are cited by Rashi to [Leviticus 10:2](https://www.chabad.org/9911#v2).

[17.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4321414/jewish/The-Mysterious-Life-and-Death-of-Nadab-and-Abihu-Sons-of-Aaron.htm" \l "footnoteRef17a4321414) Vayikra Rabbah 20:10.

[18.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4321414/jewish/The-Mysterious-Life-and-Death-of-Nadab-and-Abihu-Sons-of-Aaron.htm" \l "footnoteRef18a4321414) Ibid

[19.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4321414/jewish/The-Mysterious-Life-and-Death-of-Nadab-and-Abihu-Sons-of-Aaron.htm" \l "footnoteRef19a4321414) Talmud, Sanhedrin 52a.

[20.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4321414/jewish/The-Mysterious-Life-and-Death-of-Nadab-and-Abihu-Sons-of-Aaron.htm" \l "footnoteRef20a4321414) Yalkut Reuveni on Parshat Shemini.

[21.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4321414/jewish/The-Mysterious-Life-and-Death-of-Nadab-and-Abihu-Sons-of-Aaron.htm" \l "footnoteRef21a4321414) [Leviticus 10:1](https://www.chabad.org/9911#v1).

[22.](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4321414/jewish/The-Mysterious-Life-and-Death-of-Nadab-and-Abihu-Sons-of-Aaron.htm" \l "footnoteRef22a4321414) [Leviticus 16:1](https://www.chabad.org/9917#v1)

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