

Parshah Shemini in a Nutshell
(Leviticus 9:1–11:47)

On the eighth day, following the seven days of their inauguration, Aaron and his sons begin to officiate as kohanim (priests); a fire issues forth from G-d to consume the offerings on the altar, and the divine presence comes to dwell in the Sanctuary.

Aaron's two elder sons, Nadav and Avihu, offer a "strange fire before G-d, which He commanded them not" and die before G-d. Aaron is silent in face of his tragedy. Moses and Aaron subsequently disagree as to a point of law regarding the offerings, but Moses concedes to Aaron that Aaron is in the right.

G-d commands the kosher laws, identifying the animal species permissible and forbidden for consumption. Land animals may be eaten only if they have split hooves and also chew their cud; fish must have fins and scales; a list of non-kosher birds is given, and a list of kosher insects (four types of locusts).

Also in Shemini are some of the laws of ritual purity, including the purifying power of the mikvah (a pool of water meeting specified qualifications) and the wellspring. Thus the people of Israel are enjoined to "differentiate between the impure and the pure."
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Anshei Lubavitch Congregation

Rabbi Levi and Leah Neubort

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"Shabbos Schedule"
Shul Temporarily Closed
Please daven at Home

Erev Shabbos – Apr 17 / Nissan 23

Candle Lighting 7:21 pm

Shabbos Day – Apr 18 / Nissan 24

Shabbos Ends..... 8:23 pm

**Latest morning Shema is now 9:32 AM. Be sure to recite the Shema before that time).*

Weekday Schedule (not on a holiday):

Shul Temporarily Closed
Please daven at home.

Incense Portion

Exodus 30:22–38

Although we unfortunately no longer have the Temple, the Kabbalists say that by reading the portion in the Torah that discusses the incense, it is as if one actually brought it. Thus, although many have the custom to recite this portion daily, one should take extra care to learn and recite it at the time of an epidemic.

Upon recommendation of the Dept of Health, local hospitals, and the Rabbinical Council, the shul will be closed until further notice.

Charity

In late 1827 an epidemic broke out in the city of Orsha (near the city of Lubavitch), in which three or four people were dying daily, the in-habitants turned to his son-in-law, Rabbi Menachem Mendel, later known as the Tzemach Tzedek, for advice.

In addition to quoting a story in the Zohar about reading the portion of the ketoret during an epidemic, the Tzemach Tzedek suggested that, in light of the verse in Proverbs "And charity will save from death," they should add in charity. However, he stressed that, as is explained in Tanya, it is preferable to give charity many times throughout the day (especially before prayer) in smaller denominations than just giving one large sum, even if it equals the same amount. Ideally, the total sum of each day should be a multiple of 18.

Halachic Zmanim

Shabbos, April 18

Daylight Savings Time

Earliest Tallis 5:12 AM
Latest Morning Shema 9:32 AM
Earliest Mincha (Gedola).. 1:30 PM
Plag Hamincha 6:20 PM
Earliest Evening Shema 8:09 PM

Chassidic Masters

The Eighth Dimension

*Based on the teachings of
the Lubavitcher Rebbe
Courtesy of MeaningfulLife.com*

“It came to pass on the eighth day . . .” Thus opens the Torah section of Shemini (“The Eighth”), which describes the events of the day on which the Mishkan, the portable sanctuary build by the people of Israel in the Sinai Desert, was inaugurated.

It was “the eighth day” because it followed a seven-day “training” period, during which the Mishkan was erected each morning and disassembled each evening, and Aaron and his four sons were initiated into the kehunah (priesthood). But it was also a day which our sages describe as possessing many “firsts”: it was a Sunday, the first day of the week; it was the first of Nissan, marking the beginning of a new year; it was the first day that the Divine Presence came to dwell in the Sanctuary; the first day of the kehunah; the first day of the service in the Sanctuary; and so on. There is even an opinion that this was the anniversary of the creation of the universe.

With so many “firsts” associated with this day, why does the Torah refer to it—and by extension, to the entire Parshah—as “the eighth day”?

The Cycle

The number seven figures prominently in our reckoning and

experience of time. Most familiar, of course, is the seven-day work/rest cycle that comprises our week, a reenactment of the original seven days of creation when “in six days G-d made the heavens and the earth . . . and on the seventh day He rested.” Each Shabbat thus completes a full revolution of the original cycle, following which we start anew from “the first day”—yom rishon, as Sunday is called in the Holy Tongue.

This is why many Jewish lifecycle observances are seven-day affairs. Two seven-day festivals frame our year—Passover, which runs from the 15th to the 21st of Nissan, and Sukkot, occurring exactly six months later, on Tishrei 15–21. A marriage is celebrated for a full week of sheva berachot (“seven blessings”), and the death of a loved one, G-d forbid, is mourned for seven days (shivah). There are the seven clean days of the niddah (menstruating woman), the seven-day training period before the Sanctuary was inaugurated (shiv’at yemei milluim), the seven-day purification period from ritual impurity, and numerous other “sevens.” Thus the freedom of Passover, the joy of Sukkot, the bond of marriage, the coming to terms with loss, and all these other features of Jewish life are assimilated in all seven dimensions of created time.

Our years, too, follow the cycle of creation: six workday years are succeeded by a sabbatical year of Shemittah (“suspension”). In the Land of Israel, all agricultural work

is suspended in the seventh year, and the land’s produce is declared free for the taking for all. Also suspended in the Shemittah year are all private debts and the terms of servitude of indentured servants.

Finally, our sages describe the whole of human history as a seven-millennium week, consisting of 6,000 years of human labor in developing G-d’s world and a seventh millennium that is “wholly Shabbat and rest, for life everlasting”—the era of Moshiach.

The Kabbalists explain that the seven days of creation embody the seven sefirot (divine attributes) which G-d emanated from Himself to define and characterize His relationship with our existence. So seven is not only the elemental number of time, but of every created thing and of the created reality as a whole. This is especially true of the human being, who was created in the “image of G-d”: the human character is comprised of seven drives (love, restraint, harmony, ambition, devotion, connection and receptiveness), mirroring the seven attributes which G-d assumed as creator of the universe.

Matter and Spirit

Each of the seven units of time embodies the particular characteristics of its respective sefirah. But in more general terms, the cycle consists of two primary phases: mundanity (chol) and holiness (kedushah).

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Six days of mundane labor are followed by a day of spiritual rest; six years of working the earth, by a year of suspension and disinvolvement from the material; six millennia devoted to struggling with and developing the physical world, by a seventh millennium in which the sole occupation of the entire world will be the knowledge of G-d.

The Torah's word for "holy," kedushah, literally means "removed" and "apart." Its names for the seventh day, Shabbat, and for the seventh year, Shemittah, respectively mean "cessation" and "suspension." For holiness requires complete disengagement from all material involvements. In order to experience the holiness and spirituality of Shabbat, we must cease all material labor; in order to touch base with the holiness of the land in the Shemittah year, we must suspend all physical work upon its soil and all claims of ownership on its produce; in order to experience the divine goodness and perfection of our world in the age of Moshiach, we must first achieve a state in which there is "no jealousy and no competition" over its material wealth.

[This is not to say that Shabbat has no effect upon the rest of the week, that the Shemittah year does not profoundly influence the farmer's relationship with his land during the other six years of the cycle, or that the age of Moshiach is divorced from the workday generations of history. On the contrary: the primary function of these sabbaths is to provide spiritual vision, fortitude and purpose to the mundane periods of their cycle. But in order to do so, they must be kept distinct and apart. It is only when the boundaries between the holy and the mundane are strictly enforced that we can experience holiness in our lives, and then extend its vision and influence to our mundane endeavors.]

Yet despite their transcendent nature, the seventh day, year and millennium are constituent parts of the cycles of creation.

Materiality and spirituality might differ greatly—to the point, even, of mutual exclusivity—yet both are part of nature: both are governed by the framework of laws which define the created reality.

Indeed, the very fact that holiness demands the cessation and suspension of all things mundane indicates that it, too, has its limits. It means that just as there exists a physical nature which defines and delimits the scope of physical things and forces, so too does the realm of the spiritual have its "nature"—its own set of laws which define what it is and what it is not, where it can exist and where it cannot, and how and in what manner it can make itself felt beyond its inviolate boundaries. So while the concept of transcendence seems the antithesis of definition, transcendence is itself a definition, for it defines (and thus confines) itself as beyond and distinct from the material.

This offers insight into a key passage in the Torah's account of creation. In Genesis 2:2 we read: "G-d concluded on the seventh day the work that He had done." This seems to contradict the second part of that very verse, which reads: "And He rested on the seventh day from all the work that He had done." If the work of creation was concluded on the seventh day, then the seventh day was one of the days of creation; but if the seventh day is the day on which G-d rested from all the work that He had done, there were only six days of creation and a seventh day of Shabbat—cessation from work.

Our sages explain: "What was the world lacking? Rest. When Shabbat came, rest came." Rest—transcendence and spirituality—is itself a creation. Though removed from the nature of the material, it is part of a greater nature—the nature of the created reality, which includes the realm of the spiritual as well as the realm of the material.

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Circle and Circumference

If the number seven defines the natural reality, eight represents that which is higher than nature, the circumference that encompasses the circle of creation.

Seven includes both matter and spirit, both mundanity and holiness, both involvement and transcendence, but as separate and distinct components of the cycle of creation; the seventh dimension will exert its influence on the other six, but only in a transcendent way—as a spiritual, otherworldly reality that will never be truly internalized and integrated within the system. In contrast, eight represents the introduction of a reality that is beyond all nature and definition, including the definition “transcendence.” This eighth dimension (if we can call it a “dimension”) has no limitations at all: it transcends and pervades, beyond nature yet also fully present within it, equally beyond matter and spirit and equally within them.

So the covenant of circumcision, which binds the Jew to G-d in a bond that supersedes all nature and convention even as it pervades every nook and cranny of life, is entered into on the eighth day of life.

The Sanctuary (Mishkan), whose role was to make the infinite reality of G-d an indwelling presence in the physical world, was inaugurated on the eighth day following a seven-day training period. The festival of Shemini Atzeret (“Eighth Day of Retention”), whose function is to internalize the transcendent encompassing light of the sukkah, occurs on the eighth day that follows Sukkot’s seven days.

Seven Shemittah cycles are followed by a Jubilee year characterized by liberty (i.e., freedom from all bounds) rather than just “suspension.” And the messianic seventh millennium of history will be followed by the supra-historical “world to come” (olam ha-ba), in which the divine reality will unite with the created reality in ways that we cannot even speculate upon in a world where finite and infinite are mutually exclusive.

In the words of the Talmud (Berachot 34b), “All prophets prophesied only regarding the days of Moshiach; regarding the world to come, ‘No eye can behold it, O G-d, save Yours’” (Isaiah 64:3). ❖

From Our Sages

Aaron was silent (Leviticus 10:3)

Speech signifies comprehensibility. Melody is beyond language, expressing moods which words cannot describe. Silence is yet higher. The power to be silent at certain moments of life and of history is an important strength. It expresses the awareness that G-d is infinite, and cannot be encapsulated in our human conceptions of what should take place.

The Talmud tells of an instance in which Moses himself was told by G-d to be silent. G-d showed him in a vision all future generations of the Jewish people, and the leaders of each generation. Moses was greatly impressed by the wisdom of Rabbi Akiva. Then he saw the way the Romans tortured him to death. “Is this the reward of his Torah knowledge?” Moses asked. G-d answered: “Be silent. Thus it arose in My thought.”

This is not to say that the Torah advocates a fatalistic approach to life. Before the event, one must do everything possible to prevent tragedy. But once it has happened, G-d forbid, through the acceptance and the silence we reach a special closeness to the Divine. Our sages tell us that because Aaron was silent, he was rewarded by G-d speaking directly to him.

-- (The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

Counting the Omer

The Biblical Command to Count the Omer

The Torah writes: "And you shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the Shabbat, from the day that you bring the omer [offering] that is raised, seven complete weeks there shall be until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count fifty days (Leviticus 23:15-16).

These verses command us to count seven weeks from the time that the omer, the new barley offering, was brought in the Temple, i.e., from the sixteenth of Nissan. We begin our count on the second night of Passover (the night of the second Seder in the Diaspora) and continue until Shavuot, which is the fiftieth day after the offering.

We actually count forty-nine days, for our Sages had a tradition that the Torah's use of the word fifty meant until the fiftieth day.

It is a mitzvah for each individual to count the days of the omer by himself, for the Torah states: And you shall count for yourselves. This mitzvah is applicable today even though the Holy Temple no longer stands and we no longer bring the omer offering. Some maintain that the obligation today is Rabbinic.

When to Count the Omer

The correct time for counting the omer is at the beginning of the night, for the verse states that we are to count seven complete weeks and the count can be complete only if we commence when the sixteenth of Nissan begins.

Since we commence counting the omer at night, we continue to count at night throughout the entire forty-nine days.

We first recite the evening prayers, for the mitzvah of Ma'ariv and of saying the Shema is obligatory every day and a mitzvah that is frequently obligatory takes precedence over a mitzvah that is performed less often.

Immediately after the Amidah, we count the omer. If one neglected to count then, he may count throughout the night; and if he forgot to count at night, he may count during the day, but without the blessing.

How to Count the Omer

We first recite the blessing on counting the omer ["Who has commanded us to count the omer"] and then count, saying: "Today is the... day of the omer" Some congregations have a custom of saying baomer, in the omer, while others have a custom of saying laomer, of the omer. On the first night one says: "Today is one day of the omer" and on the second night one says: "Today is two days of the omer"

This practice is followed until the seventh day, when we make a slight change and say: "Today is seven days which is one week of the omer".

Congregations that follow the Sephardic rite say: "Today is the seventh day of the omer which is one week"; i.e., the word omer is always juxtaposed to the number of the day rather than to the concurrent count of weeks.

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Counting the Omer (continued)

From the seventh day on, one adds the count of weeks to the count of days; e.g., "Today is eight days which is one week and one day of the omer" and the Sephardic wording is "... eight days of the omer which is one week and one day."

If one made a mistake and neglected to count either the days or the weeks, he must count again but does not recite another blessing.

When counting, one should be careful to use the correct grammatical form (e.g., using the word yamim, days, until ten and then yom from that point on, and using the masculine form for the count of the weeks].

The blessing and the counting should be said while standing, for the verse (Deuteronomy 16:9) states: When the grain is standing in the fields. But if one sat while counting, he has nevertheless fulfilled the obligation.

After counting the omer, it is customary to say: "May it be Your will that that the Beit haMikdash be rebuilt speedily in our days."

More Details Regarding Sefirat HaOmer

The count is to be made at the beginning of the night, i.e., as soon as three stars appear. If one counted earlier [but after sunset], he is not required to count again, but nevertheless it is proper to do so, albeit without a blessing, after the appearance of the stars.

If one is asked what is the proper count for that night: If the person being asked has not yet counted himself, he should not say the number of that night for he will in effect have counted the omer without saying a blessing and he will be unable to count again with a blessing.

Rather, he should say: "Last night was such and such." One should be especially careful on Lag baOmer, the thirty third night of the omer, for it is quite common to refer to that day by its number.

Before reciting the blessing one should know the number of the day. However, if one recited the blessing without being aware of the number and added the number only after having heard it said by someone else, he has fulfilled the obligation.

If one thought that he knew the number of the day when he recited the blessing but realized that he was mistaken after hearing it said by others, he may still count and need not repeat the blessing.

If he recited the blessing and then counted the wrong number: If he remembered within about 18 seconds and he did not say anything else before realizing his mistake, he may count the proper number without repeating the blessing. And if not, it is considered as if he has not counted, and he recites the blessing and counts anew.

If he neglected to count one day [i.e., both at night and on the following day], or if he counted the wrong number, he may no longer recite a blessing when he subsequently counts but he must nevertheless continue to count. However, if he does not remember whether he counted or not, he may continue to count the remaining days of the omer with a blessing.

It is customary that following the counting of the omer, one recites Psalm 67, for according to tradition that psalm has forty nine words, corresponding to the days of the omer. ❖

Haftarah for Parsha Shemini in a Nutshell

II Samuel 6:1-19

This week's haftarah mentions how Uzzah was struck dead when he disrespectfully touched the Ark of the Covenant; reminiscent of Nadab and Abihu's death described in this week's Torah reading.

The Holy Ark had been in storage in the house of Avinadav for many years, ever since the destruction of the Tabernacle in Shiloh. Recently crowned King David decided to move the Ark to the new capital, Jerusalem. He had the Ark placed on a cart and it was transported amidst singing and dancing. When the procession reached Goren Nachon, the oxen misstepped and Uzzah, Avinadav's son, took hold of the Ark to steady it—whereupon he was instantly killed.¹ David was devastated, and he temporarily placed the Ark in the home of Oved-edom the Edomite, where it remained for three months.

"And it was told to King David saying: 'G-d has blessed the house of Oved-edom, and all that belongs to him, because of the Ark of G-d.' And David went and brought up the ark of G-d from the house of Oved-edom into the City of David with joy." The Ark was brought up to the city of David with great singing and dancing. David then blessed and distributed presents to all the assembled Israelites. ❖

The Talmud teaches that the best vaccine against all illness is a healthy confidence in the Director of the Universe.

From all of us at Anshei-Lubavitch, we hope and pray for the safety and health of you and your loved ones. May the Almighty protect us all and send complete healing to those who need healing. And may our world very soon find the ultimate cure to all diseases with the coming of Moshiach, sooner than we can imagine.

"It would be desirable that you establish the custom of reciting Tehillim — at least a few kapitlach —in shul during the weekdays as well. Convey to the congregants the words that my revered father-in-law, the Rebbe, related: that reciting Tehillim protects [a person] from many undesirable matters and draws down abundant good for the needs of every single individual."

-- Lubavitcher Rebbe

16 Iyar, 5711

Good Shabbos to all!

שבת שלום גוט שבת!

