



## The Parsha in Practice

### What's Next?

After the run up to Pesach, the cleaning, preparation and cooking, the busy and hectic holiday itself, with its all-important themes and significant symbols, you would think it might be time for a break. Haven't we done enough ritual, shul, davening, and enough reflecting on this or that? Might it be time - perhaps? - to take a few weeks off and relax from anything introspective or thought provoking?

No such luck. We finish Pesach to immediately contemplate a Yom HaShoah, wait a few more days to face the memories of Yom HaZikaron and then wait one more day for our vicarious celebration of Israel's independence on Yom HaAtzmaut. All of this in addition to the daily Sefirat HaOmer that counts us towards the next holiday installation: Shavuot. Gevalt! When does it end?

Our parsha describes how on the eighth day of the inauguration of the Mishkan, following seven days of Moshe independently doing the service, the Kohanim were consecrated as the ones who would take over as the exclusive group to manage the Mishkan's affairs. On this day, Moshe summoned Aharon to take a list of animals with which to begin this process of sacrifice and offering.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein wonders why we don't find that Aharon was provided advance notice with which to prepare these animals. Don't we find by other Korbanot (the Pesach and the Tamid) that we set aside the animals in advance? A preparatory period would allow for a better performed ritual, would it not? Why didn't Aharon get that opportunity for these Korbanot?

Rav Feinstein answers that while preparation might have been a good thing, there's an important reason why it was not offered here. Commanding Aharon to do these Korbanot immediately after Moshe finished his service teaches that although a lengthy mitzvah sequence was just completed (the inauguration) and we might imagine that it would be time for a Mishkan break, we immediately enter into the next mitzvah and the next chapter of avodah with no pauses or time for preparation.



This lesson permeates these weeks of Sefirat HaOmer as well. We're likely familiar with the Gemara which relates that during the period between Pesach and Shavuot many thousands of R' Akiva's students perished. This is the source of the mourning customs we practice during this time. What is less well-known is the context of that Gemara. The Gemara there (Yevamot 62) is speaking about staying active as we get older and not relying on the work we have done when we were young. Whether relating to child rearing, Torah teaching, or investing energies in acquiring students, the Gemara teaches that a person should never rest on their laurels and should rather continue to accomplish in their older years as they did when they were younger.

With this in mind, the Gemara tells the tragic story of R' Akiva. Not simply to share the tragedy, but to relate what happened next. Despite the loss of his many students, he found new, capable and more refined students and through them was able to reestablish Torah in his generation. No one would have batted an eyelash if R' Akiva would have stepped off into the sunset of retirement having impacted the world as he already had (he had a pretty late start to begin with!). But he did not walk away. He began again.

The pasuk in Job (5:7) teaches that *אָדָם לְעֵמֶל יוֹלָד*, *a person is born to do*. Of course taking some time off to be able to recharge the batteries is understandable. Otherwise, we burn out and lose our ability to apply our full efforts. But to imagine that there is a time at which we are "done," seems anathema to our belief system. We are on this planet to endeavor, to effort, and to hopefully achieve. We are meant to traverse from one mitzvah accomplishment to the next with the least amount of time in between.

In the early aughts, one of the most popular shows on TV was *The West Wing*, whose main character, President Jed Bartlett would consistently face difficult decisions and crises. When one would end, he would always say "What's next?" It became a persistent refrain on the show, and I remember always being inspired by the work ethic this (fictional) character displayed.

So yes, the consecration of the Mishkan just ended. What's next? Aaron needs to take his position immediately as the heir to the avodah. Yes, R Akiva's students are lost and you'd think that at this point he could mail it in, but instead, he also asked "What's next?" and found his answer.

We've left the arduous holiday of Pesach and while we might desire some respite from all the big ideas and the important conversations, we too are challenged to consider "What's next?" Now that we are redeemed, what are we living our lives for and counting towards? Aside from the historical impact of the Pesach story, what other significant historical moments must we mark and be engaged with? How will we do so?

So what is next? Answering these questions.

Shabbat Shalom,

Shmuel Ismach