

Divrei Jeshurun

Parshat Shemini 5761

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Statistics: Shemini

- ❖ 26th of the 54 Torah portions
- ❖ 3rd of 10 in Vayikra
- ❖ Written on 157.2 lines in a Sefer Torah
- ❖ 6 parshiyot; 3 open, 3 closed
- ❖ 91 verses- ranks 41st (4th in Vayikra)
- ❖ 1238 words - ranks 41st (5th in Vayikra)
- ❖ 4670 letters - ranks 41st (5th in Vayikra)
- ❖ Tzav contains 17 of the 613 mitzvot according to the *Sefer ha-Hinukh* - 6 positive & 11 negative (see chart)
- ❖ In 13 month years, Shemini is either parshat Parah or Chodesh. In 12 month years it is always the Shabbat right after Pesach.

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Halakha in the Parsha: Halakha Chart

The following is a listing of the commandments in this week's parsha. The first column is a simple ordinal listing within the parsha. The next column lists each mitzva relative to the total of 613. The next column states whether the command is positive or negative.

#	613	⊙	Command	Source
1	149	N	<i>Kohanim</i> cannot enter the Temple with untrimmed hair	Lev. 10:6
2	150	N	<i>Kohanim</i> cannot enter the Temple with torn clothing	Lev. 10:6
3	151	N	<i>Kohanim</i> cannot leave the Temple during their term of service	Lev. 10:7
4	152	N	<i>Kohanim</i> cannot enter the Temple nor rule cases if they have been drinking.	Lev. 10:9
5	153	P	To inspect wild & herd beasts for signs of <i>kashrut</i>	Lev. 11:2
6	154	N	Not to eat a forbidden wild or herd beast	Lev. 11:4
7	155	P	To inspect fish for signs of <i>kashrut</i>	Lev. 11:9
8	156	N	Not to eat a forbidden fish	Lev. 11:11
9	157	N	Not to eat a forbidden fowl	Lev. 11:13
10	158	P	To inspect locusts for signs of <i>kashrut</i>	Lev. 11:21
11	159	P	That the <i>shemona sheratzim</i> (the Eight Vermin) are unclean	Lev. 11:29
12	160	P	That food dipped in liquid is liable for uncleanness	Lev. 11:34
13	161	P	That an animal carcass (<i>neveila</i>) is unclean	Lev. 11:39
14	162	N	Not to eat earthbound <i>sheratzim</i> (vermin)	Lev. 11:41
15	163	N	Not to eat insects	Lev. 11:42
16	164	N	Not to eat waterborne <i>sheratzim</i>	Lev. 11:43
17	165	N	Not to eat <i>sheratzim</i> created through parthenogenesis	Lev. 11:44

Parsha Insight: And Then There Were None: Round up the Usual Suspect

The parsha contains a murder mystery. We have the victims, Nadav & Avihu, the eldest sons of Aaron ha-Kohen. We have the suspect, God. We have a smoking gun (or whatever). But we lack a motive. Why were the victims at the scene of the crime, and why did the Perpetrator use deadly force?

Presumably, Nadav & Avihu died because of sin. Our tradition and sages list a number of these possible reasons. For example (according to Yehuda Nachshoni): (1) entered into the Temple improperly dressed, (2) they officiated while drunk, (3) they brought coals from an ordinary stove and not from the center altar, (4) they offered a sacrifice that was unauthorized, (5) they were so haughty that they refused to marry because all women were beneath their station, (6) consequently they refused to have children, (7) they ruled on *halakha* in front of their teacher (Moses), (8) They ate & drank in God's presence (see **Exodus 24:11**), (9) they wanted Moses & Aaron to pass away quickly so they could take over, or (10) they did not respect each other.

This is quite a litany of sin! We might as well add one more to the fire (so to speak). Possibly, their sin was their separation from the Jewish community. Where were they while everyone was celebrating the dedication of the Temple (as seen just one verse before, **Lev. 9:24**)? This is a one-time event, and it seems that they had something better to do! In that sense, it seems totally appropriate that the fire which comes from God to consume the community sacrifices (in that verse **Lev. 9:24**) -- a fire that caused the entire population to "sing glad song" -- should be the fire of their punishment

Deeper Texts: Holocaust Remembrance Day.

In his classic lecture *Kol Dodi Dofek*, Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik draws a distinction between living according to fate or destiny. A person who believes that events happen because of fate denies human free-will and denies God's concern with our behavior. Events were meant to happen. But to believe in destiny means to believe in a mission -- to believe that God expects you to react to the world according to goals and principles. We Jews believe in destiny. That no matter what history throws our way, we respond by following God. We respond to triumph & tragedy equally: Torah.

An illustration of this principle is the book *Shaalot u-Teshuvot Mi-Maamakim* (Responsa from Dire Straits), written by Rav Ephraim Oshry. Rav Oshry was imprisoned in the Kovno ghetto during the Holocaust and was asked harrowing questions by the Jews facing the worst conditions in human history. He answered the questions of horror with Torah. We learn from his responsa both about the unspeakable conditions of the Shoah, and about the towering faith of the Jews.

Here is an example of one question (translation by Y. Leiman).

19. The Blessing for Martyrdom

Question: My eyes run with tears again when I think of the Jews who sanctified G-d at the hands of the evil Germans on the Black Day — as the Jews in the Kovno Ghetto labeled 8 Marcheshvan 5702 — October 29, 1941. On that day men, women, and children — young and old, infants and babes in arms — were butchered by the merciless enemy.

On that day an order was issued by the accursed Germans that every single ghetto dweller, without exception, must appear in the Demokratiaplatz for review by the Germans. Whoever stayed home would be put to death.

It is impossible to describe the fear and terror that seized the Jews of the ghetto, all of us aware that our fate was being determined on that day. The ghetto houses were emptied of their inhabitants as parents took their young children in hand; older children supported their elderly parents, and the weak and the ill were moved by their own families. All of us wept as we marched to the plaza of terror, and crying and wailing split the air. It is impossible to describe the agony. We who did not know what our end would be, were certain it could not be a happy one.

A Jew named Eliyahu who had fled from Warsaw to Lithuania, thus escaping the German snare, was aware that most of the people waiting in the plaza would be put to death by the following day. He asked me, "What is the precise text of the *berocha*' that sanctifiers of G-d must recite before being put to death? Does one say '*asher kideshonu bemitzvosov vetzivonu al kidush HaShem*'² or, '*vetzivonu lekadeish es HaShem*'?³ He wished to know precisely which text to use to fulfill what might turn out to be the last mitzva of his life. Besides he wished to tell as many people as possible what blessing to recite if their turn came to die.

Response: I ruled that the proper blessing was neither of the texts he had mentioned, but the text established by the author of *Shaloh* — *Sheney Luchos HaBeris* — which is, "*asher kideshonu bemitzvosov vetzivonu lekadeish shemo borabim*,"⁴ the very text that I intended to recite.

Reb Eliyahu repeated the text several times, then proceeded to inform other Jews as to its exact phrasing so that they should be prepared when and if their time came to die in sanctification of G-d.

Some time later he told me that the martyred *gaon* Rav Elchonon Wasserman had told his son, Rav Naftoli — G-d, avenge them both! — who was in the Kovno Ghetto at this time, to recite the text of the blessing as established by the *Shaloh*, and he quoted the Chofetz Chayim as the authority for this.

I also heard from the grandson of the Chofetz Chayim, Rabbi Yehoshua Levinson — G-d, avenge him too! — who was with us in the ghetto, that he had heard his grandfather during the First World War say, when bands of marauding murderers led by Petlura, Machno, and others were wandering through Russia, that one should recite the blessing according to the text of *Shaloh*.

1. Blessing.
2. Who hallowed us with His commandments and commanded us about sanctifying the Name.
3. ...and commanded us to sanctify the Name.
4. ...and commanded us to sanctify His name publicly.