



Parshas Shemini

April 9, 2021

## A Taste of Torah

### Two Are Better than One

by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

The big day had finally arrived, as Aharon prepared to perform the service in the newly-inaugurated *Mishkan* as the High Priest for the first time. Aharon, however, hesitates, telling his brother Moshe that he is embarrassed to begin, as he feels the weight of the Golden Calf, which he had helped create, upon his shoulders. Moshe assures Aharon that all is well, telling him, "Why are you ashamed? It is for this that you were chosen!" Aharon approaches and performs the service, but the *Shechina* (Divine Presence) does not rest upon the *Mishkan*.

As the nation watches and waits, Aharon realizes his fear has come true: Hashem has rejected him due to his past misdeed. Turning to Moshe, he wonders why he has been put through this disgrace. Moshe enters the *Mishkan* with Aharon, and the two pray together. This time, the *Shechina* appears. Aharon is vindicated! Hashem has accepted him as the *Kohen Gadol*!

Or has He? Did Aharon's efforts truly elicit a response from Hashem? Things only changed after Moshe joined the fray. Seemingly, it was Moshe who made the difference; when Aharon was alone, nothing happened.

A closer examination of these two great men will reveal an understanding of this incident. Aharon and Moshe play two distinct roles within the leadership of the Jewish People. Moshe is the one who brings the Torah down from Heaven; he is the conduit from Hashem to the Jewish People, bringing them Hashem's commandments. Aharon, on the other hand, is the person who lifts the Jewish Nation upward toward Hashem. He is the *Kohen Gadol*, the one who takes the physical possessions of the nation and raises them up in holiness. While Moshe imposes the Torah and Hashem's will upon the People, Aharon seeks to unite them as one and raise them up toward their Father in Heaven. Thus, our Sages describe Aharon as the peacemaker among the Jewish People, more beloved even than Moshe. For while

Moshe is the leader from above, Aharon is the leader from within.

Both of these roles are vital in creating a connection between *Bnai Yisrael* and Hashem. They must accept and incorporate what Hashem gives them from above, namely, the Torah, but they must also prepare themselves as a vessel to ascend and receive that greatness, a process that occurs through the submission of self that occurs through *avoda*, the service performed in the *Mishkan*.

The *Mishkan*, the place where the *Shechina* would reside, contains both of these elements. There is, of course, the *avoda* of the many different offerings brought in the *Mishkan*, but the *Luchos*, contained in the *Aron* (Ark), are also in the *Mishkan*, making this rarefied structure the repository of Torah, as well.

For the *Mishkan* to function, both Torah and *avoda* must be present. The Torah that Moshe brought down would be contained in the *Aron*. It was now necessary for Aharon to create a reality of *avoda*. But Aharon feared that he was not worthy, as he had been complicit in the Golden Calf debacle. Moshe's response, referenced earlier, is noteworthy at this juncture: "Why are you ashamed? It is for this that you were chosen!" My friend and colleague, Rabbi Chaim Sher (of *Merkaz Hatorah V'chesed* and *Hillel Academy of Denver* fame), once told me that Moshe's words can be understood as saying that it is precisely Aharon's shame that made him the perfect person for the job. The understanding of this is that the role of *avoda* requires submission and a willingness to sacrifice not just animals, but oneself! A major part of bringing an offering is that one vicariously offers oneself through the offering. Aharon's involvement in making the Golden Calf was due to his desire that the blame fall upon his shoulders instead of upon the Jewish People. While he did help create it, he did so as an act of self-sacrifice

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## Stories for the Soul

### Feigned Ignorance

based on a story on [achim.com](http://achim.com)

When Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (1820-1892; better known as the *Bais Halevi*) was appointed rabbi of Brisk, he was reputed to be a towering scholar, thoroughly knowledgeable in every area of Torah. Soon after his appointment, a difficult question was brought before him, and, instead of giving a ruling, he responded, "I don't know." The questioners were surprised and left.

Curiously, this happened again with the second question he was asked. The community began to feel somewhat disappointed but, for the time being, nobody said anything. After this happened a third time, the lay leaders held a meeting to discuss the situation. Perhaps he was a great scholar, they said, but a community rabbi must be able to answer halachic questions. After some discussion, they reached the conclusion that there was no choice but to ask the new *rav* to leave.

When the communal leaders came to the *Beis Halevi* and expressed their disappointment, he smiled and told them, "Don't worry. With Hashem's help, I will manage to answer your questions from now on. All I wanted to do was to establish, for both you and for myself, that if it ever happens that I really don't know the answer, I won't be embarrassed to admit it."

In this week's parsha, Moshe is corrected on a halachic

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## Halacha Riddles

**This week's question:** How is it possible for a food's blessing to differ on Pesach from the rest of the year?

**Answer:** Many Sefardic Jews recite *mezonos* on matzah year-round, but recite *hamotzi* on it on Pesach! The reason for this is because technically, matzah is *pas haba'a bikisnin*, a category of bread-type foods that, for practical halachic purposes, includes three basic categories: 1) dough that is filled with other items (e.g., a knish); 2) dough that whose majority of liquid is something other than water, such as eggs or oil (according to some, these liquids must change the flavor of the item) or a significant amount of other non-bread flavorings such as sugar (items such

as cake and cookies would be included in this category); 3) a hard, cracker-type product (see Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 168:7).

The final category includes matzah as we know it today, which is a cracker-type item. Ashkenazim recite *hamotzi* because matzah is treated as a meal-type item and is thus regarded as regular bread. However, Sefardim treat it as bread only on Pesach, when it replaces year-round *chametz* bread (see Machazik Bracha 158:5 and Yechave Da'as 3:12).

**This week's question:** When would the blessing on an item be upgraded due to the passage of time, with no human intervention?

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders

### Rabbi Saadia Gaon - Part XXIV

Yehuda died seven months after his father Dovid ben Zakkai, leaving behind a young orphaned son. Rabbi Saadia took the

infant into his house, caring for him as his own child.

## A Taste of Torah

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to save others. It is this self-effacement, expressed through his shame, that enabled Aharon to bring the element of *avoda* into the *Mishkan*.

Once Aharon accepted that role and performed the service, he believed that all the pieces were in place, and the *Shechina* ought to arrive. However, one more crucial element was necessary: The unification of these different parts. Yes, there was Torah, yes, there was *avoda*, yes, the *Shechina* was ready to come. But the joint prayer of Moshe and Aharon would unite them, and their roles, together with Hashem. Moshe realized this, and so he and Aharon prayed to Hashem that the *Shechina* rest in the *Mishkan*. At that point,

all the different elements united and the *Mishkan* was fully activated.

The role of Torah and the role of *avoda*, which is today realized through prayer in the absence of a *Bais Hamikdash* in which to bring offerings, are two distinct but vital parts of living a Jewish life. It has been said that Torah is Hashem talking to us, while prayer is us talking to Hashem. Torah comes from above and is imposed upon us, while prayer is our opportunity to connect to Hashem by submitting ourselves before him through our power of speech. By engaging in both areas properly, we further the process of bringing the *Shechina* into our lives.

## Stories for the Soul

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matter by his brother Aharon. Despite being the person who brought the Torah down from Heaven to the Jewish People, Moshe admits he was wrong and does not

try to defend his error. Those who strive for truth, and not for their own honor, are not afraid to admit when they don't know something or make a mistake.

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