

Parshas Shemini and Parshas Hachodesh

This week's Parsha, Shemini, is a unique one that can be read eight times in some years (depending on when Pesach falls out). It delves into the intriguing concept that eight is above nature, a topic often discussed in Kabala and Chassidus.

The world was created in six days, and on the seventh day, Hashem rested. We commemorate this weekly by keeping Shabbos. The world has six epochs before Mashiach's arrival, which will usher in Mashiach- the seventh day- Shabbos. Beyond the natural order, there are eight, representing beyond nature, essentially, the aspiration for the world when Mashiach will be here. (On Chanukah, we have eight candles, one above the standard seven lit in the Beis Hamikdash- and that eighth day is the day beyond the norm).

To usher in an era of eight that is beyond the norm, on a global or personal level, we must maintain that Hashem is the creator, and everything is from Him. In the first Rashi, we are told that the words "elders of Israel" (9:1) tell us that Aaron is the high priest because Hashem said so for no other reason.

This is relevant to us today, as it is expected to question authority or leadership on some level, whereas, for the service of the priests and the Beis Hamikdash, there may be reasons we can try to attribute or accept the authority based on nepotism, or some other reason (as Korach complained). Still, like all other concepts in the Torah, we listen and

do it because Hashem said so (which connects to later in the Parsha where we are taught about Kosher animals.).

The eighth day, taught in the parsha, is that for seven days by the inauguration of the Tabernacle, Hashem's presence didn't rest on the nation, and they thought it was due to their improprieties and not being forgiven for the sin of the calf, or Aaron not thinking he was worthy. But once Moshe prayed with Aaron (for which Moshe credited Aaron), the spirit rested on the Jews on the 8th day.

The lesson is that in our natural world, we will work for seven days, i.e. all the days until Mashiach comes, but during that time, we may complain that we don't see the fruits of our labour. Understandably, you can get frustrated, as the Jews did, but then, one final push and prayer, and the "eighth day"- the above normal, is revealed, and Hashem's presence is revealed in a revealed way. That would mean ushering in the era when we have made an abode for Hashem.

If done improperly, though, holy as it may be, you can be like the sons of Aaron, whose lives were extinguished for their improper sacrifice. So how do we prevent this, by following the Torah and its teachings, and knowing, and practicing with specific actions, the laws? As the Alter Rebbe in Tanya explains in Chapter 38, if you think, with all your concentration on the words of prayer, you will not fulfill your commandment, whereas, even if you said the words without the right concentration, you can meet your obligations. Because, as the Alter Rebbe explains, to bring the spirit of Hashem and nourish your soul, you need

action, not just thought. In this world, we need action; that is how we will change the world around us to the positive, achieve the eighth day, bring the ultimate revelation, and open miracles and peace in the world.

The timing of this parsha couldn't be better—we also read Hachodesh, the Shabbos preceding Chodesh Nissan, about the rebirth of the Jewish nation and arguably the entire purpose of creation. The theme of the Haftora is similar in that we must follow the edicts and laws of the Torah as prescribed—in this way, we will usher Mashiach now.

Good Shabbos!