



**TORAH ACADEMY**  
of Bergen County

# קול תורה

**Parashat Shemini**

**26 Nisan 5777**

**April 22, 2017**

**Vol. 22 No. 25**

## AHARON VS. MOSHE WITH KEDUSHAH ON THE LINE by Tani Greengart ('18)

The tenth Perek of Sefer VaYikra is a strange one. Nadav and Avihu, sons of Aharon HaKohein, bring an unsolicited Korban Ketoret into the Mishkan and Hashem consequently kills them with fire. Moshe confides to Aharon that this was Hashem's plan all along, and proceeds with business as usual; he has his cousins move the bodies out of the Mishkan and tells Aharon and his remaining sons to continue the Avodah rather than mourn their dead family members. In the meantime, Hashem tells Aharon not to drink alcoholic beverages while doing the Avodah. Then Moshe gets upset that Aharon and his sons burnt the Korban Chatat of Bnei Yisrael instead of eating it. Aharon retorts "*Hein HaYom Hikrivu Et Chatatam VeEt Olatam VaTikrena Oti KaEileh; VeAchalti Chatat HaYom, HaYeitav BeEinei Hashem?*" "Today they brought their Korbanot Chatat and Olah and this happened to me; if I eat the Chatat today, would Hashem be happy?" (VaYikra 10:19). Upon hearing this, Moshe changes his mind and agrees with Aharon.

What on earth is happening in this Perek? Why do Nadav and Avihu bring the Ketoret? Why is Moshe so unsympathetic to Aharon and his family? Why does Hashem tell Aharon not to drink? Why do Aharon and his sons not eat the Korban Chatat when they are supposed to do so? And what is the meaning of Aharon's reply to Moshe?

To explain this Perek, we must first acknowledge one of the central themes of the Perek: Kedushah, holiness. The word Kedushah, in one form or another, appears in this twenty-Pasuk Perek *eleven* times, and the expression "Lifnei Hashem," "before Hashem," also signifying holiness, appears another six times.

Kedushah is completely personal; it is the process of one person bringing himself or herself as close as possible to Hashem.

Nadav and Avihu want as much Kedushah as they can get--they bring Ketoret Lifney Hashem, a fire emerges from Lifney Hashem, and they die Lifney Hashem (10:1-2). Everything they do is between them and God.

So, are Nadav and Avihu successful in their quest for Kedushah? You might think that they are unsuccessful because they both die. But Moshe tells Aharon that they were indeed successful, that the deaths of Nadav and Avihu brought Kedushah to Hashem (10:3). In fact, Rashi (ad loc. s.v. Hu Asher Dibeir) explains that Moshe tells Aharon that Nadav and Avihu were closer to Hashem than even Moshe and Aharon. Moshe sees the deaths of Nadav and Avihu not as a tragic failure but as a tremendous act of Kedushah.

Aharon is not so sure.

Aharon does not *disagree* with Moshe's understanding of Nadav and Avihu's deaths--at least, he does not disagree enough

to say so--but he does not seem enthralled either; the Pasuk tells us that in response to Moshe, "*VaYidom Aharon*," Aharon is completely silent (10:3). This is the silence of a grieving father, the silence of a man who is unsure whether his beloved sons died as heroic martyrs or as unwanted trespassers in God's house.

Who better to resolve this confusion than Hashem Himself?

Immediately after this incident, Hashem speaks directly to Aharon (10:9), telling him not to drink intoxicating beverages while doing the Avodah, in order "*Lehavdil Bein HaKodesh UVein HaChol, UVein HaTamei UVein HaTahor*," "to differentiate between holy and profane, between unclean and clean" (10:10). Since Rabbi Yishma'el in the Midrash tells us that Nadav and Avihu were drunk when they offered the Ketoret (VaYikra Rabbah 12:5), the direct interpretation of this command to Aharon is that it is a condemnation of Nadav and Avihu because their drunken minds clouded their judgment. (This contrasts to Moshe Rabbeinu's support for Nadav and Avihu.) However, Hashem's explanation of this Mitzvah reflects on the meaning of Kedushah itself. The truly fascinating part of Hashem's explanation is the *prima facie* assumption that there *should* be a difference between Kodesh and Chol, that a category of things that are not Kadosh should even exist. Why should anything ever be less than perfectly Kadosh when we are all striving to become closer and closer to Hashem?

But God says no. The lesson He imparts to Aharon is that the category of "Chol" is absolutely necessary, and a clear mind is required to differentiate it from "Kodesh." The fallacy of Nadav and Avihu, and to an extent, the fallacy of Moshe Rabbeinu, is that they did not understand that Chol is important, that a person cannot be Kadosh all the time. They did not understand that Mitzvot Bein Adam LaMakom are not always paramount.

This explains why Moshe continuously pushes Aharon and his sons not to mourn and to continue the Avodah; after all, mourning is not Kadosh and the Avodah is, so mourning should be forbidden as long as there is Avodah to be done.

Only Aharon, with his newly advanced understanding of Kedushah, comprehends that this is not the case. Aharon intuitively understands that even for the Kohein Gadol, the Kedushah of eating a Korban cannot transcend the emotional requirement of mourning for his sons on the day of their deaths. He understands that mourning is a Mitzvah as well, even if it is not as "Kadosh" as eating a Korban. This is the Halacha of Aninut--an immediate relative of a person who dies is exempt from all other Mitzvot.

When Moshe Rabbeinu hears Aharon's explanation, he immediately relents and agrees with Aharon; the Gemara in Zevachim states that Moshe had heard this Halachah before, but he had forgotten it (Zevachim 101a).

Baruch Hashem, the Halachot of Aninut are applied infrequently. But this lesson that there are things more important than personal Kedushah is one that can be applied throughout our lives. I do not mean to say, God forbid, that improving personal Kedushah is wrong; on the contrary, in the 38 years that Aharon served as Kohein Gadol, he did the full Avodah every day but this one. Great personal Kedushah is certainly admirable. However, Aharon teaches us that there should be more to our lives than just Kedushah; for example, Aharon's non-Mikdash activity was teaching Torah to Bnei Yisrael (VaYikra 10:11). He could have spent that time learning alone or bringing more

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Ketoret to become more Kadosh, but he instead recognized the importance of helping other people learn to fulfill the Mitzvot. As Hillel says in Pirkei Avot (Mishnah Avot 1:12), "Heyu MiTalmidav Shel Aharon: Ohev Shalom, VeRodeif Shalom, Ohev Et HaBeriyot, UMekarvan LaTorah," "Be a student of Aharon, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving all people and bringing them closer to Torah."

May we all strive to be like Aharon, a man who maintained high levels of Kedushah while simultaneously catering to the needs of his emotions and his fellow Jews.

## ARE PARENTS ACTUALLY CRAZY?

by Eitan Leff ('18)

In this week's Parashah, Nadav and Avihu die for bringing an Eish Zarah, foreign fire, before Hashem. The Haftarah portion of each Parashah is chosen because the Haftarah connects to what happens in the Torah. The Haftarah for this week is Shmu'el II 6:1-7:17, in which Uzzah ben Avinadav is killed by Hashem for touching the Aron. The Haftarah connects to the Parashah because in the both the Torah and Haftarah, people die while trying to do something for Hashem. Nadav and Avihu try to give a Korban to Hashem and Uzzah tries to stop the Aron from falling.

Later in the Haftarah, David moves the Aron from the house of Oveid-Edom HaGitti to the City of David. While the Aron is being moved, David sings and dances. When David returns to his household, his wife, Michal bat Sha'ul, says sarcastically "*Mah Nichbad HaYom Melech Yisra'el Asher Niglah HaYom LeEinei Amhot Avadav KeHigalot Niglot Achad HaReikim,*" "How honorable was the king of Israel today, exposing himself today in the sight of the servants of his subjects, as one of the riffraff might expose himself!" (Shmu'el Bet 6:20). David HaMelech answers her that he is dancing before Hashem, who chose David over Michal's father, Sha'ul. As a punishment for questioning David, Michal has no more children.

How is not having kids an Onesh Middah KeNeged Middah, measure for measure consequence? We can answer this question by quoting a Midrash. The Yalkut Shimoni (Tehillim 846) states that people act like fools to entertain their children because a person's love for his child is greater than his sense of normalcy. Should a person not love Hashem at least as much as he loves his children? David "acted like a fool" to dance before the Aron and Michal questioned David for "acting like a fool" as someone would for a child. So she was denied more children.

Another application of this Yalkut Shimoni could be a question posed to Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein in Teshuvot VeHa'arev Na. This was the case: a wealthy Jew died and did not have any children, so in his will he gave money toward Torah study and towards the welfare of the mentally ill, who are unable to care for themselves. The only condition of his donation for the mentally ill was that only the mentally ill of his town would be able to take from the fund. One day, a widower with a large family asked for some money from the charity for the mentally ill, which had a lot of available money due to the fact that only the mentally ill from one town were allowed to take from it. The trustee of the fund refused the widower because the money was meant for mentally ill people, not widowers.

The widower decided to bring the Yalkut Shimoni in Tehillim 846 as a proof that he actually was mentally ill. The Midrash says "a father once stipulated in his will that his

son may not inherit his estate until the son goes mad. R' Yossi ben R' Yehuda and Rebbe went to R' Yehoshu'a ben Karchah to ask him [how to interpret this stipulation]. They peeked inside R' Yehoshu'a's house and found him crawling on his hands and knees...following his young child around the house. [After he had finished playing with his child,] they entered R' Yehoshu'a's home and told him about the condition in the will. R' Yehoshu'a laughed and said, 'I have just now fulfilled the condition of which you speak.' They answered him, 'From here we see that if a man has children, he acts as if he has gone mad.'" The Rabbis concluded that the deceased man's intention was to let his son claim the inheritance only after he had children of his own.

The widower therefore concluded that he was eligible to take money from the fund for the mentally ill since he had to act like a fool to entertain his children. Is he correct?

Perhaps this case could be analogous to a case of moving Tzedakah funds from one charity to another. R' Yehoshua Leib Diskin allowed money given to an orphanage to be re-appropriated to purchase Mezuzot for the needy. R' Yehoshua said that Mezuzot granted long life, and by giving the needy Mezuzot, they will live longer, which will help prevent their kids from having to be cared for by the orphanage.

Rav Zilberstein rejects the analogy to the orphanage case because in the orphanage case, the money that is taken away from the orphanage will in the end help the orphanage--the orphanage will not need to take care of the children of poor people because their parents will be alive. By contrast, in the case of the widower, the wealthy Jew made the fund only for people who were actually mentally ill, not for people who joke with their children. Giving this money to a widower will not bring any benefit to the mentally ill, so it is not allowed. We want to help people who are in need of immediate assistance to survive.

## A NEW MEANS TO RESOLVE TENSION BETWEEN SCIENCE AND TORAH

by Avi Cooper ('17)

Imagine if I were to hold out a coin and then let go. If I were to ask you in which direction the coin would start moving, I assume that you'd tell me it would move towards the ground. But upon closer inspection of the law of gravitational force, this doesn't seem glaringly obvious. The law of gravitational force states that the force between two masses is proportional to the negative product of the Gravitational constant and the two masses, and inversely proportional to the distance between the two masses squared, or  $\frac{-Gm_1m_2}{r^2}$ . This law merely describes the given force of attraction at a certain distance, but says nothing regarding the direction masses tend to move when not supported. Yet any child will tell you that masses tend to minimize the distance between themselves, or in the case of our coin, fall down to the ground.

Generally, the laws of physics, like the Law of Gravitational Attraction mentioned above, tend to move in only one direction, colloquially known as the arrow of time. Events seem to always happen easily in one direction and typically resist movement in the opposite direction. For example, picking up a heavy load, increasing the "r" in the gravitational force equation, is strenuous. But interestingly, the equation described above has no variable representing time, even though it seems to be bound by it. Time is conspicuously absent from all of the fundamental laws of nature, save for the Second Law of Thermodynamics, the law of entropy. This law states: "Any isolated system will tend towards increasing entropy, or disorder."

For example, when milk is first poured into a cup of coffee, it is very ordered, or “described.” The milk is on top, the coffee below, and there’s an easily definable line between the two. However, as time passes, the milk will start to diffuse into the coffee, creating swirls of coffee-milk, which are much more disordered, harder to mathematically define. When the milk becomes fully diffused, when we are left with a cup of coffee-milk, the system is said to be in equilibrium. Though the coffee and milk particles are still moving about, they no longer have a net direction, and therefore the system no longer experiences “time.” Change becomes nonexistent.

In the same way that mass tends towards increasing entropy, or disorder, energy also tends towards diffusion. This is why a high storage battery is unstable; it desperately “wants” to release its energy. Returning to the coin example, through the Law of Gravitational Attraction does not contain a variable for time, it is influenced by entropy. A levitating coin contains a large amount of potential energy, or the possibility of doing work, if we were to capture the energy of its falling down. But a coin on the ground contains comparatively little potential energy. The Law of Entropy would state that the coin would “prefer” to move from the high, stored-energy state of the levitating coin, to the low, dispersed-energy state of the coin on the ground. This discussion yields an important insight: time, and the arrow of time, are not inherent to the universe or its fundamental forces. Instead, it describes the tendency of systems to move in one direction guided by these fundamental forces, while the fundamental forces themselves describe only the correlation of one moment in time to the moment preceding it, and the moment following.

To give a slightly more conceptual example, imagine that we were to walk into a room and observe a line of dominoes falling down. We freeze the system in the middle and consider the first domino that has not yet fallen. The one before it is mid-fall, and thus we assume that when it falls, the domino under observation will begin its own fall. We assume this because we know the law governing a set of falling dominoes: When one falls, the next one will begin its own fall. We can trace this single law through the entire set of fallen dominoes, each time assuming that the cause for this domino falling was because the one before it fell, and so on, until we reach the first fallen domino. We thus conclude that some force felled the first domino. Our understanding of the universe is, in many ways, the same. We observe the current state of the universe, and using the fundamental laws of physics, trace back to what science believes to be the beginning, the Big Bang. And like our single law of falling dominoes, the fundamental laws of physics do not contain a variable for time; they merely relate one moment to another.

But consider the following proposition. It is quite possible that before we entered the domino room, someone set up the dominoes, placed a fraction of the dominoes already fallen down, and midway through the line, left one leaning over. This person then let go, allowing the dominoes to fall according to their natural law. As we now observe the system, it would be impossible to prove that this did not happen. While the law of dominoes indicates that the first domino in the line was the first to be pushed down, we can only assume this to be true. Similarly, within our own universe, we can only make assumptions about the universe’s history utilizing the fundamental forces. This assumption is key, and leads us to a startling conclusion. The reality of history, or the fact that historical events actually happened, is a philosophical question, not a scientific one. When we consider the history of our own universe, we cannot conclude definitively a certain history of the universe through science. Rather, this history is philosophical in nature.

When attempting to understand the age of the universe, there are two strict parameters that must be considered. Firstly, the

overwhelming consensus of classical Jewish sources maintain that the Creation literally occurred over a span of seven twenty-four-hour days. (For example, see Talmud Bavli Masechet Chagigah 12a and the accompanying Rashi, s.v. Midat Yom, which explicitly states that there are 24 hours for every day and night. Additionally, Ramban on BeReishit 1:3 writes that the six days of Creation were like the six days of the week, the simple understanding of the verse.) While others who deal with the age of the universe understand the Creation to have taken much longer, or that the entire Creation story is simply an allegory, their views are clear departures from tradition. Yet on the other hand, there are troves of scientific evidence that point to a universe beginning with the Big Bang, and for life on Earth developing via evolution. Holding the Torah to be absolutely true and divinely inspired, we are faced with the quandary that science presents that seems to point in an opposite direction. (For a logical approach to the divine origin of the Torah, and Judaism, please see Rabbi Lawrence Kelemen’s video, “A Rational Approach to the Divine Origin of Judaism.”)

One possible explanation that seems to satisfy both constraints presented above is the theory that God created the universe in seven, twenty-four-hour days, exactly as described by the Torah, but when He finished with the Creation, the world looked exactly as it though it had existed for billions of years. There was evidence of the Big Bang and evolution, as we observe today. Essentially, God created the world with the dominoes already half-fallen, and started the falling process somewhere in the middle. And as concluded above, the laws of science could never disprove such a hypothesis; instead, questioning of such a claim must be rooted in the laws of philosophy.

Principal among the philosophical laws that would pose difficulty to such an explanation is Occam’s Razor, which states that “one should not make more assumptions than the minimum needed,” or as it is better known, the easiest explanation is typically the correct one. (A belief in the Torah is required *a priori*, as one could use Occam’s Razor against the existence of a Creator. The assumption of believing in a God without evidence is less reasonable when science provides a cogent explanation obviating the need for a Creator, or external force. But, again, for a rational approach to Judaism, see Rabbi Kelemen’s video.) Within religion itself, this Occam’s Razor allows for a similarly reasoned argument: assuming that God created the world in a way that made it seem as though it had existed for billions of years is quite specific. Why did God go to the trouble of covering his own tracks, as it were? Did He really have to plant the dinosaur bones in the ground to trick us? There are several explanations, and they are as follows:

Firstly, Judaism understands that belief in a Creator requires some logical leap. If it were possible to scientifically prove that God exists, there would be no possibility for free choice, or the possibility of choosing one’s path in life. All would be forced to believe in God, and thus no special reward could be placed on those that *chose* to believe. God therefore decided to create the world in a way that would make the disbelief a possibility. The Gemara (Shabbat 86a) records that Hashem held Har Sinai over the Jewish people like a barrel, threatening to bury them alive if they refused to accept the Torah. This dynamic, however, was untenable, as a sinner could claim that he was under duress when accepting to abide by the Mitzvot. This abundantly clear proof of God, while good in theory, does not allow for free will. It is for this reason that the Jewish people had to re-accept the Torah in the times of Megillat Esther, in which Hashem is completely hidden. In

the entire episode of the Megillah, not one miraculous event occurs, yet a Torah-believing Jew sees God behind the scenes. Only after this realization can one accept the Torah.

Secondly, creating the world in any other way may have been infeasible. The reality at the time of Creation may have forced the Creator to design it in such a way as if it was running smoothly the whole time. For example, simply placing the atoms of hydrogen and helium within our Sun may have been disastrous for the Sun's initiation at the end of Creation. In order for the Sun to properly operate, it would seem necessary to create the temperature, velocity, direction and position of each particle beforehand to allow for the proper "continuation" of fusion in the Sun afterwards. In this scenario, God created the Sun within the physical guidelines of the previous, nonexistent state of the sun, much like the first un-fallen domino. Similarly, it would have been necessary to create Adam with cellular processes already in motion, with lipid and starch storage already deposited, and with neurons already configured in a way to allow for basic thought. Adam had never experienced cell growth or division, had never ate, and had never created memories. Yet without these artificial initial conditions, it would have been impossible for him to survive even for a moment.

Having established the need to create the world "in motion," one may again apply Occam's Razor to question: if God did create the world in this way, why did He choose this specific moment in time 5777 years ago? When God viewed the possible timeline for the universe, or in the domino example, when He viewed the line of dominoes, why did he choose the specific moment, or domino, that He did? Why not place the moment of finished creation earlier or later? Why not place it in the very beginning, to resolve all seeming contradictions of historical reality as presented by the Torah and historical reality as presented by science? It is possible to answer this question with the answer to another, similar issue. Why did God create the Universe at all? He has no need for the praises of humans nor the need for them to do his commandments. The classical Jewish response is that humans, and the ability to bestow constructive kindness upon them, was the impetus for Creation. We can now apply this line of thinking to the original question. When God chose the moment in the timeline of history to place the physical Creation, He placed it at the moment that human civilizations rose to prominence, when humans could recognize, accept, and benefit from a close relationship to Him. Though there were theoretical humans earlier in the timeline, they did not possess the necessary requirements to function as the purpose of Creation.

With this theory in mind, there are two important realizations that one must take into account: first, the non-mutual exclusivity of Science and Torah, and second, the importance of the study of science from a theological perspective.

This first realization, that science and Torah are not mutually exclusive, results from the separation between the possible timeline of history and the miraculous events that occurred before the end of Creation. In fact, this dynamic allows for greater intellectual freedom when viewing the world through both Torah and scientific lenses. Some religious fundamentalists maintain that evolution must be false, regardless of the contradicting data, because a simple reading of the Torah points to an alternative historical reality. These individuals maintain this stance from a scientific perspective, citing, for the most part, incomplete evidence for transitional species. Yet this position would seem untenable in the long term, as the procedural structuring of the scientific method provides for the formulation of a hypothesis, the testing of this hypothesis, and the reformulation of the hypothesis in the event that results were improperly predicted. Even if transitional fossils do continue to pose a problem with the

current evolutionary model, the model will be altered to better fit the data. These fundamentalists will then be forced to find new bases for their disbelief in the possibility of evolution until updates to the model are again found.

However, with the Creation model suggested above, the theoretical history of the universe was actualized within our physical universe. The evidence is present, even though it did not physically occur. Thus, it is possible to fully research and understand the Theories of The Big Bang and Evolution, in line with modern scientific theory, without any qualms that such findings would contradict the Torah. Furthermore, regardless of how scientific theory develops, this view will not change.

The second realization is that it seems as though science contains an inherent theological importance. Creation as described by the Torah, while not perfectly in line, is uncannily similar to the current scientific understanding of the development of the Universe, through the Big Bang and Evolution. As Dr. Nathan Aviezer and Dr. Gerald Schroeder present, noted here very generally, "And there was light," can refer to the Big Bang, "The waters teemed with living creatures," can refer to the beginning of life in the sea, and as the verses progress, the evolutionary path from sea to land. To reiterate, the correlation is not perfect. The Torah presents the creation of birds before land animals, which does not match with the evolutionary-fossil record. But a book that contains many of the same developmental pathways as does science while also predating modern scientific theory by millennia should be seen as prophetic, and divinely inspired. It would seem next to impossible for a human author to have simply guessed the general outline of Big Bang Theory and Evolutionary Theory in a time period that predated even the Aristotelian era of thought.

The first chapter in Genesis, aside from suggesting the divine origin of the Torah, has an additional importance. Thus far we have asked several questions including "How old is the universe?" and "Why was the universe created at the time it was?" Now we ask: "Why create the universe in the specific way described by the Torah?" Again, as described above, if the Creation process of the universe had nothing to do with the way the universe looked at the culmination of Creation, why not create it in an instant? Or why not create humans first, followed by vegetation, followed by light, followed by the oceans? It would seem as though God chose to create the universe in a way that mirrored the theoretical timeline He placed the universe into. He looked to science, and the cosmological constants that He established, and based theological Creation on it. This would point to the theological importance of science as the source of the Creationary process.

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