

## 21 – Shemini – Outline

### Shemini Summary Extra Points

- “Shemini” = “Eighth:” “On the eighth day...”
- It’s almost like Aaron and his sons have to die (through the inauguration korbanot) and be reborn and live one 7-day cycle in the Tabernacle before they are considered new creatures able to work in the Tabernacle

### The Eighth Portion Connected to Building the Tabernacle

- this is the eighth consecutive portion closely connected to building and setting up the Tabernacle
  - should speak to us about just how very important this concept of the Tabernacle is to God, a primary picture of how a redeemed people live with God in their midst

### Shemini = “Eight,” First Steps in Transcendence

- Hebraically, 7 is the number that signifies completion of a natural cycle
  - Ex: 7 days of creation, 7 days of the week, 7 colors in the rainbow
- 8 signifies the miraculous TRANSCENDENCE of the natural order, one BEYOND the natural
  - breaking out of seven means that we have been granted mastery over the natural so that we can use it for spiritual purposes rather than merely natural purposes
  - circumcision is a statement that the flesh of this boy is dedicated to holy purposes
- Transcendence and Shemini
  - first note that the portion is read during or near to Passover, the time for transcending, leaping levels
  - Shemini is about worshiping God, and worship is closely connected to transcendence
    - “Let My people go so that they may worship Me...”
      - the beginning of the Tabernacle service is the clear fulfillment of what Moses was asking for
  - both coming out of Egypt (the focus of the Passover season) and the korbanot are about freedom from the rule of the flesh and true worship of God with our entire lives
  - why is this portion, in particular, named for transcendence?
    - we are FULLY reaching a point of transcendence only here because having the plan and making the preparations (steps 1-7) aren’t enough to transcend; transcendence doesn’t start until you begin to “bring it down” to the “real” world, the world of action, the lowest world
      - notice: Transcendence doesn’t mean that the physical is inactivated or put aside; it’s the opposite. Transcendence happens

when the physical is mastered and engaged to be a channel for the spirit

- the physical and spiritual always go hand-in-hand
- Firstfruits is the end-goal picture now in the calendar, and it has a strong physical component that leads to the flow of the spirit
  - barley is the physical component of bread; it is animal fodder; this offering gives Israel access to the new crops (food – physical)
  - but Firstfruits is an act of WORSHIP at the Temple, a korban offering; the physical is used as a vessel for the flow of the spirit
- we are now taking BABY STEPS in walking at a higher level of transcendence; it's the beginning of a new cycle

### **It Starts with God's Gracious Gift**

- the beginning of the process is God raising us up – GOD'S GRACE
  - God personally opens the womb
  - don't be frustrated thinking, "How do I raise myself higher now?" or "How will this time I'm trying to change be any different from the others?"
  - Israel does little at the time of Passover – apply the blood to the doorway; God does all the heavy lifting at the beginning
    - our part at the beginning is mostly trusting that we CAN change, moving when He says to move, doing what little we can, but rising to a new level is not dependent on our works
  - R'Shais Taub: paraphrase: It's cruel to tell someone to jump to the next level when all they have to work with is themselves, when they've tried many times and failed and maybe even dug a deeper hole
    - [https://www.chabad.org/multimedia/video\\_cdo/aid/1483949/jewish/Getting-Unstuck.htm](https://www.chabad.org/multimedia/video_cdo/aid/1483949/jewish/Getting-Unstuck.htm) 5:30 & 24:30
    - fall off the wagon and slide deeper
    - leaning into your strengths to try to change, when your strengths are tainted with Egypt – just makes things worse
    - R'Taub: GOD has to lift us up to the next level

### **We Have a Part to Play, Too**

- our first part is the small gesture of obedience He always asks us to do at the beginning
  - R'Trugman: "This idea is widespread in Jewish thought, that man must act in even a small way in order to open the gates for God to respond from above. The Sages taught that God says: 'Open to Me as the opening of the eye of a needle and I will open to you as the great entrance to the Temple hall' (Zohar 3:95a; Pesikta Rabati 15:6)."
  - for us, the seder is such a gesture
  - but the root of this gesture at this time of year is a prayer that reveals outwardly the intentions of our hearts, like this, which we can say now in this season:
    - "God, I trust You. I trust that in the same way that You delivered Israel out of Egypt, You are in this season delivering me now. You are a gracious

God. And I trust in the blood of the true Lamb, Who is Yeshua, slain from the foundation of the world for all mankind. I claim that blood on the doorway of my heart now, and I trust You to pass me one step higher out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of light. I trust that You have a whole year of learning and victory ahead for me. And I rejoice in that now. I again offer you my life entirely. Thank You.”

- our second part: give your whole life entirely over to God
  - Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “Salvation is free, but discipleship will cost you your life.”
  - release your spouse, children, home, job, bank account – everything to God, and ask Him to empower you to treat each as He would treat them

### **Baby Steps During the Omer – Working on the Nephesh**

- the Rabbis give us a little direction in our baby steps at this time: work on the nephesh
  - we’re reading about the sacrificial system
  - the omer is animal fodder, and each day of the omer is referencing this measure of barley offered to God
    - if we are offering the lowest possible korban at this time, the renewal God will respond with in this season is the renewal of the lowest aspect of the soul
  - nephesh: the “animal” soul: instinctual drives and appetite; the emotions are a bridge region that also reach into this part of the soul
    - animals function off instinct, appetite, emotions
    - nothing wrong with these drives – we need such drives to be induced to care for ourselves and create the next generation
    - the problem is when the nephesh comes to rule us rather than our higher soul (neshamah)
- how can we practically take baby steps in the realm of the nephesh now?
  - approach training the nephesh as we approach training animals (punishment and reward, consistency)
  - suggestion: this week we are intentional to take one small step away from whatever we sense is imbalanced in our walk when it comes to instinctual drives and appetites and emotional wellness
    - be consistent
    - also develop a punishment for stumbling, and be consistent with it
    - again, remember that the victory is not found in ourselves but rests on the work of the Lamb and God’s gracious deliverance at this time (His raising us up another level now)

### **Nadav and Avihu**

- point 1: the deaths of Nadav and Avihu are one of these examples of how God is very strict at the beginning of a major stage of development
  - as He is strict with Israel in the wilderness and with Ananias and Saphira
  - the leaven of the world must be removed at this time because such leaven at this point will cause an oversized effect later

- point 2: maybe Nadav and Avihu were created for just this moment of their death
  - clue: we are told they had no children (they probably had not married): “But Nadav and Avihu died before the LORD when they offered unauthorized fire before the LORD in the wilderness of Sinai, and they had no children. So Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests in the lifetime of Aaron their father” (Numbers 3:4)
    - God had prepared them for this moment; it is a strong lesson to Israel that innovation outside of Torah commandments is deadly
    - Romans 9: Paul talks about God’s sovereignty to make of one lump of clay both a vessel for honorable use and a vessel for dishonorable use
  - children often think parental punishment is harsh; they lack the capacity to understand
    - if we are slapped on the hand now, it is especially a time to accept that the punishment is for the best and don’t get too distracted trying to understand
- point 3: Nadav and Avihu teach us something about MISPLACED ZEAL
  - another connection to taming the animal soul, including the emotions
  - children are filled with zeal which is sometimes not channeled properly; they must be taught
  - “strange fire” – Grant connects this to emotion, passion, zeal  
 ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojl7Rk5ur\\_Q&list=PLsc9G96-XmdBTpab6H\\_38jQroEbo8JyVR&index=26](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojl7Rk5ur_Q&list=PLsc9G96-XmdBTpab6H_38jQroEbo8JyVR&index=26))
    - the Sages also teach that these two had a great hunger to worship and draw near to God
  - examples of “strange fire” among Believers, a zeal that somehow misses the mark, resulting in instability in their walks
    - openness to worshipping God in unorthodox way that seems to lack self-control
    - the idea that they should hear from God about every little detail in life, like what they should wear today
    - the root of their attraction to Torah being really founded on an attraction to Jewish culture
    - a vast zeal for pointing fingers at the declining culture or other Believers
    - a single issue that they become so attached to that it causes separation with others (certain calendar disagreements, the use of extra-biblical sources, how we should approach the Jewish scholarship over the centuries, what has become of the Lost Tribes of Israel)
  - when our passion causes us to act outside of God’s instruction, it leads to instability and death

### **Kashrut – the Food Laws**

- what are these laws doing here in Shemini?
  - they are a mirror reflection of the korbanot laws
    - korbanot laws: laws of worship, spiritually high, obviously spiritual (secondarily physical), focused on offering ourselves as “food” for God

- kashrut: about preserving self by taking in food, obviously physical (secondarily spiritual)
  - the two complement each other
  - both are foundation to the idea of transcending
  - consider: Tazria-Metzorah is perhaps also a part of the reflected image of the korbanot
- the great power of kashrut
  - not obvious to most people, but they have great power to keep our spiritual vision clear and to gain self-control and even to witness to others
  - Rabbis: eating unclean food brings on a “spiritual fog”
  - these are “chukim,” laws that are beyond human reason
    - such laws that we obey with simple faith like a child have great power to affect us and the world
    - they do a work of separating us from the world and from man’s constant desire to understand first, then do
  - these laws are pervasive in our daily lives: breakfast, lunch, and dinner, a trip to the grocery store, a dinner with friends
    - in keeping them, our self-control is constantly reinforced
- this is an appropriate topic for a time of first steps in the year, foundational to our walks
- kashrut is a gift of the revealing of God’s mind through the animal kingdom
  - certain animals live off death and decay and are unclean; others graze and do not live off death and are clean

### Yeshua

- the “ultimate eight” comes after Yeshua’s return, the eighth millenium of human history
  - final chapters of Revelation
- the 7<sup>th</sup> is still connected to the natural cycle; this millenium will entail the 1,000 year reign on a world where the natural still appears to dominate, but since the enemy is locked away, there is world peace
- the 8<sup>th</sup> millenium is something different, when the supernatural is the norm and the natural is a bit harder to see underneath

### Joshua 18-19

- the final 7 tribes receive their land
- focus on 18:3: “So Joshua said to the people of Israel, ‘How long will you put off going in to take possession of the land, which the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you?’”
  - word translate “put off:” “mitrapim,” root “raphah,” “slack/to sink down/relax”
    - the word implies DOWNWARD MOVEMENT
  - lesson: transcendence is a going up, but first there is a reaching down to master the physical, then the using of it for spiritual purposes, which raises the physical up. The tribes are being given this chance to reach down and take hold of the

physical land and use it to be a light, but they hesitate from fear. This results in “mitrapim,” sliding downward.

- there is no standing still; we are either transcending or we are slipping downward; we’re either climbing or falling

## 21 – Shemini – Transcript (not exact)

Hello and welcome to Beth Tikkun and this series called “Spiritual Seasons,” where we are exploring the Torah portions in the light of God’s spiritual curriculum for the year. Today we are in parsha Shemini, Leviticus 9-11.

### Shemini Summary

Let’s get right into the portion with a summary. The portion can be divided into two seemingly unrelated parts: the events of the concluding 8<sup>th</sup> day of inaugurating the Tabernacle and the laws of clean and unclean food, including how dead animals transfer uncleanness. The portion’s name means “eighth,” and refers to the first part of the portion, the events that happen on the eighth day of inaugurating the Tabernacle. The portion begins, “On the eighth day...”

Much happens on that eighth day, which was altogether intense. It included what would probably be both the highest point in Aaron’s life followed immediately by the lowest point. In the previous chapter, we witnessed Moses anointing Aaron and his sons for service, and it was Moses who performed the sacrificial offerings for that process, not Aaron. Moses finished that first part of Aaron’s inauguration by telling Aaron and his sons that they must stay within the Tabernacle for seven days before the inauguration is complete. It’s almost like Aaron and his sons have to die and be reborn to a new kind of service. They die through the inauguration sacrifices, and their first weekly cycle of new life is all within the Tabernacle, making them new creatures that are not fully of the lower realm anymore but are now creatures of the Tabernacle. Being this new kind of person, Aaron and his sons now have the right to be dwellers in the Tabernacle and workers there.

On the eighth day, Aaron and his sons are now fully inaugurated and can begin doing the service themselves. After the people bring him a number of animals for the korbanot that he will offer on their behalf, the whole nation gathers around before the Lord. Aaron first offers a bull and ram for himself, then he does four types of korbanot for the whole nation, including sin, olah, peace and grain offerings. Aaron then lifts his hands and blesses the people, which the rabbis say was Aaron doing the Aaronic blessing. Later, Moses and Aaron bless the people together. At that point, the glory of the Lord appears to the people, and fire comes out from before the Lord and consumes the pieces on the altar, causing the people to yell out and fall of their faces.

In the next chapter, we read the tragic story of the deaths of Aaron’s sons Nadav and Avihu, which seems to also have happened on the eighth day. They are struck dead when they offer incense to the Lord that the text calls “strange fire.” It was not done according to the laws of the korbanot. Moses tells Aaron that he must not mourn them yet, but let the nation mourn them. He then calls in two relatives to carry the bodies out of the Tabernacle, leaving Aaron and his two remaining sons, who must have been absolutely stunned, to complete the day’s activities.

Finally, in the last chapter, we are given the dietary laws, the laws of animals that are clean and, therefore, acceptable to eat, and those that aren't.

### **The Eighth Portion Connected to Building the Tabernacle**

One thing to notice here about this portion is that it is yet another portion connected to the building and setting up of the Tabernacle, which started way back in parsha Terumah, Exodus 25. In fact, this portion called "Eighth" is the eighth portion in a row that is closely connected to this one topic.

This should speak to us about just how very important this concept of the Tabernacle is to God. What we are seeing in the Tabernacle and the service there is a picture of how a redeemed people live with God in their midst. With this topic so critical in the Torah, maybe one way we can think about the Torah is this: God desires to dwell among us, within us, but in order to do that, we must be a clean people, and the various laws of the Torah are reflecting to us what that clean life looks like. It's all training us in purity so that God can live with us.

### **Shemini = "Eight," First Steps in Transcending the Physical**

Let's return now to the name of the Torah portion, which is always a great launching off point for going deeper because the name is the description of the portion's essence. This is the only portion that is named for a number, the number eight, specifically the eighth day of inaugurating the Tabernacle. So let's talk about the number eight.

Hebraically, 7 is the number that signifies completion of a natural cycle, the fullness of the natural order. The world is designed to function according to the natural order and is created in 7 days. We even have a tradition of separating the colors of the rainbow into seven, and the western musical scale is based on 7 notes. Eight signifies the miraculous TRANSCENDENCE of the natural order. It is one BEYOND the natural. When we break out of seven and get into eight, it means that we have been granted mastery over the natural so that we can use it for spiritual purposes rather than merely natural purposes.

We see this same idea in circumcision on the eighth day. The cutting away of the foreskin is a mastery of the physical so that the flesh can be used for spiritual purposes and not merely natural purposes. It is a statement that the flesh of this boy is dedicated to holy purposes.

What does this idea of rising above the natural into the supernatural have to do with this portion? Well, first of all let's note the portion's close connection to Passover. We are reading this portion in the week of Unleavened Bread. Passover is all about transcending to a higher level, being raised up. It is about freedom from the authoritarian rule of the flesh, being set free so that we can live for God according to our design.

And one important aspect of our design for the godly life is worshiping God according to God's ways, and we read about worship in Shemini. Transcendence is closely connected to worship. If we are transcending, everything we do in life becomes worship. Recall what Moses keeps saying to Pharaoh: "Let us go so that we can worship God." Here with the beginning of the



Tabernacle service is the clear fulfillment of what Moses was asking for, Israel worshiping God in the way that God has prescribed for them. And so there is this close connection between the Passover story and this Torah portion and this beginning of worship at the Tabernacle. What are the sacrifices picturing if not freedom from the authoritarian rule of the flesh, which Egypt symbolizes? Let me say this idea another way: coming out of Egypt, which we focus on now in the Passover season, is freedom from the rule of the flesh and true worship of God with our entire lives, and what we do at the Tabernacle is also freedom from the rule of the flesh and true worship of God with our entire lives. It's a burning up and elevating of the flesh. Passover and worship at the Tabernacle are two sides of one coin. They are similar pictures of freedom for service, and this is transcendence, the number 8.

But I want to point out here that none of the previous portions about the Tabernacle are named after the number of transcendence. Why this portion? We are FULLY reaching a point of transcendence only here because having the plan and making the preparations aren't enough to transcend – planning and preparing are what 1-7 are about, the previous 7 portions that finish with Aaron's inauguration. All of that is preparatory. The transcendence doesn't start until the Tabernacle begins to be used in what we sometimes call the "real" world, in the lower world of the physical that touches the lives of the nation of Israel.

There's an important point here we should notice. Transcendence doesn't mean that the physical is inactivated, put aside somehow. It's the opposite. Transcendence is connected to increased physicality and effective and efficient *doing* in this natural realm. When we say, "transcend," we don't mean go and live on a mountaintop and pray all day. In our growth process, in our process of transcendence, in our salvation process, we find that as the physical pathways are controlled and directed properly according to our true identity, more and more of the spirit can pour outward through us, so, and here's my point, THE PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL ALWAYS GO HAND-IN-HAND. Look at human development. A child is spiritually immature and also physically small. An adult, who is much bigger physically, is much more capable of being a vessel for the spirit in this world.

This means that if we are looking for spiritual maturity, we should be looking for how someone is sacrificing their flesh, their energy, their time, their resources for others. The two have to come together. It's not just about what they know and what they can teach. It's about what they are doing. It's about their WHOLE walk, the fruit in the rest of their lives.

Firstfruits is the calendar picture now that speaks to us of the ultimate transcendence. The strong physical component of Firstfruits is put to use for the flow of the spirit, spiritual purposes. Last week we talked about Firstfruits as the third and final part of a picture of salvation, and we emphasized the PHYSICAL aspect of Firstfruits, the idea that it involves the physical components of bread. It's earthy barley flour, and the food of the nation depends on this offering. These are all strongly physical components to Firstfruits. We also made a connection to the third day of creation, where God brings order to the chaotic waters below (the physical realm, as opposed to the waters above, which are the spiritual realm) and dry land is formed – again an expression of shaping the physical domain. **But this strong physical**

element is ONLY ONE SIDE TO FIRSTFRUITS. If Firstfruits is a picture of the end goal, if we could even call it the finalization of the SEED for growth for the year, then it cannot be primarily focused on physicality, despite this strong physical aspect to it; rather, IT'S FOCUSED ON BRINGING FORTH THE RIGHT PHYSICAL VESSEL FOR POURING OUT THE SPIRIT that has been mostly locked up within. The flow of the spirit is the goal. Did you notice that unlike the seder or Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits is actually an expression of WORSHIP? It's a korban at the Temple. At Firstfruits, the priests offer to God at the Tabernacle or Temple a small gift. They wave it before the Lord as a sacrificial offering. It's a moment of worship. In other words, let me say this point again, although Firstfruits has this strongly physical component to it, and that's the completion of a kind of seed, that physicality is not the true goal. Firstfruits is not MERELY physical. Firstfruits is the goal of the salvation picture because, more than the first two, Firstfruits shows us what it looks like TO PUT THE PHYSICAL TO WORK FOR SPIRITUAL PURPOSES. Again, the physical development and pouring out of the spirit go hand-in-hand. So, the goal is not to deny the physical, and the goal is not merely to develop the physical for its own sake. THE GOAL IS TO CONTROL AND DEVELOP THE PHYSICAL FOR SPIRITUAL PURPOSES, to provide channels in this lowest realm for the spirit to flow through to do the work of the spirit, the bringing of heaven to earth. This is how we transcend mere physicality. And this is what the green plants of Day 3 are doing, providing the vessel for bringing heaven to earth. They are living things through which the breath of God flows.

So the fact that this portion in particular is named "Shemini" is showing us that it's not enough to hear and understand and plan and prepare; it's not until we start DOING that we start transcending. And I say "start" transcending here because we are early in the calendar, and we are still early in the exodus story here, too, the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the second year in the wilderness. These are first steps, baby steps, in walking at a higher level. We are learning to transcend at a higher level now. And we see missteps here, with the story of Nadav and Avihu. A baby falls a lot when it's learning to walk, and we do too as we are learning to walk at a higher level with God. First God raises us up to a higher level, and we can think of that as a free gift, but then we have to learn how to walk there. And God will help us like a father or a mother helps a baby that is learning to walk.

### **It Starts with God's Gracious Gift**

Notice that the beginning of this process is God raising us up. It is God Who personally opens the womb to deliver the child. It's important that we recognize this work of God's GRACE because we might be getting frustrated thinking, "It's the season for going higher! How do I go higher? What do I have to do? How will my efforts to change THIS TIME be any different from my efforts to change before?" Well, there IS some work to do. But we begin that work by RESTING IN GOD'S FREE GIFT, His grace expressed through the blood of the Lamb. And Grant has often pointed out to us, God asks Israel to do very, very little at the beginning of this journey with Him – take the blood and apply it to their doorways. He does ask for this small gesture of obedience in the real world. But in the end, it is God Who does all the heavy lifting here at the beginning of this salvation journey. It is God Who breaks Egypt's back. It is God Who drowns Pharaoh's army into the Sea. And the fact that God is by His grace lifting us up here at the beginning is critical.

So listen again to the pattern: FIRST GOD RAISES US UP TO A NEW LEVEL, and THEN we learn to walk at that level, WITH HIS HELP. Our part BEGINS with simply TRUSTING that He really is doing this work of raising us up now. If we don't believe, we won't actualize it. And from that place of trust, we pay attention to what He's bringing and how He's speaking in this time. And we move when He says move. And we do what we can. And if we stumble, we get back up and keep trusting in Him. What is this whole life thing about if we don't believe that He is helping us to grow and change here? It starts with trusting that He is making that available to us. WE CAN CHANGE, and that change begins as a free gift. Take hold of that. Believe it. Trust Him in this.

In talking about just this subject of God's gracious work to lift us up at this time, R'Shais Taub (pronunciation?) teaches that it's cruel to tell someone to "jump to the next level" when they have already tried many times and failed many times to change, and sometimes in their trying they have just dug themselves a deeper hole

([https://www.chabad.org/multimedia/video\\_cdo/aid/1483949/jewish/Getting-Unstuck.htm](https://www.chabad.org/multimedia/video_cdo/aid/1483949/jewish/Getting-Unstuck.htm) 5:30 & 24:30). That can happen when we fall off the wagon and slide into a deeper pit than before. It can also happen when we go deep into what we think are our strengths to try to solve the problem. R'Taub explains – and I'm rephrasing heavily here—that one problem we can run into here is that our God-given strengths are corrupted with Egypt, where we learned to rely on our strengths to cope and to survive: maybe we learned how to use our quick humor to divert attention or get what we think we need, or maybe we learned to use a love of detail to get praise through perfectionism. Maybe we leaned into our people skills to be the life of the party to get the praise and sense of self-worth we seek. And so once we see that something is seriously amiss in our lives and our relationships are suffering, we will probably lean even harder into our strengths to try to solve our problems, and in the end, our imbalance just makes everything worse. It's cruel to say, "Try again!" and watch someone sink deeper into their issues. All we have to work with is who we are, and if who we are is smothered in Egypt, then our efforts will only make things worse. We need something HIGHER THAN US TO LIFT US OUT OF EGYPT. And then we start walking from that higher place. Again, it is God Who opens the womb. But then we learn how to walk with Him once we are born again.

### **We Have a Part to Play, Too**

Having said that it starts with His gracious act of rebirth, let's shift now to our part, because we also have a part to play in this process. We mentioned before that one of our parts comes at the beginning and is particularly small, a small gesture of obedience. (R'Trugman: "This idea is widespread in Jewish thought, that man must act in even a small way in order to open the gates for God to respond from above. The Sages taught that God says: 'Open to Me as the opening of the eye of a needle and I will open to you as the great entrance to the Temple hall' (Zohar 3:95a; Pesikta Rabati 15:6).") For Israel, it was applying the blood of the lamb. For us, one way we make this small gesture at this time of year is by simply doing the seder. But in another sense, we show our faith and obedience by simply expressing to God that we trust Him for deliverance, and really believing it, doing the work of trusting. Let's say you missed doing a seder this year. Say a prayer now like this. Say it out loud.

“God, I trust You. I trust that in the same way that You delivered Israel out of Egypt, You are in this season delivering me now. You are a gracious God. And I trust in the blood of the true Lamb, Who is Yeshua, slain from the foundation of the world for all mankind. I claim that blood on the doorway of my heart now, and I trust You to pass me one step higher out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of light. I trust that You have a whole year of learning and victory ahead for me. And I rejoice in that now. I again offer you my life entirely. Thank You.”

I will include that prayer in the outline for this video. There will be a link posted below. Remember that God wants us to do a little something concrete to show outwardly where our hearts are and our purpose to obey. He requires us to bring out into this lowest realm the intentions of our hearts to humble ourselves and submit to Him for renewal and restoration and healing.

So, this is step 1 for what *we do*. Step 2 can be stated rather quickly: give everything in your entire life over to Him, and He will show you how to make every aspect of your life holy and fill it with His Spirit and use it in His kingdom, for life. That’s all! Grant would often give us a quote that I think came from Dietrich Bonhoeffer that went something like: “Salvation is free, but discipleship will cost you your life.” Learning to walk at a higher level means learning how to even more deeply say, “My wife is not mine but yours,” or “My husband does not belong to me but to You. Help me to treat my spouse as You would. These kids are not my kids; they are your kids. Help me to raise them up as You would. This job is not my job. This house is not my house. This bank account is not mine but Yours.” The process of salvation starts with God’s free gift, but in the end, it costs us everything. And it’s the only way to really live, and it’s peace, and its joy, and it’s real productivity and deep relationship with God and others around us.

### **Baby Steps During the Omer – Working on the Nephesh**

Let’s drill down now a bit on the idea that we are learning to walk at this higher level now. The rabbis give us a little direction in doing this. They give us direction by pointing us to a particular area of the soul they say God is helping us to work on right now during the Counting of the Omer: the nephesh.

We have learned many times that the nephesh is often called the “animal soul” or the “animal side of the soul.” And what have we been reading about in Leviticus? We’ve been reading about sacrificing mostly animals. And this omer period is also connected to the barley harvest. Barley is considered food for animals. The whole of the omer period refers back to this Firstfruits offering of one omer of animal food, barley flour. We count 1 day of the omer, 2 days of the omer, and onward until the 50<sup>th</sup> day. And so, if we are offering the LOWEST POSSIBLE KORBAN at this time, submitting that to death and elevation on the altar, the renewal God will respond with in this season is the renewal of the lowest aspect of the soul. It is here that we are taking our first baby steps in the year.

The nephesh is sometimes described as our instinctual drives and appetites. Our emotions are a bridge region that also reach into this part of the soul. Animals are described as functioning

nearly entirely off their drives and emotions rather than the intellect. There is nothing inherently wrong with these drives. Without the drive for comfort, we wouldn't make homes. Without the drive of hunger, we wouldn't keep our bodies alive. Without the drive to procreate, we wouldn't create a new generation, and humanity would die out quickly on the earth. The problem with the nephesh comes when it is ruling us rather than our higher soul, which we might call the neshamah.

A baby learning to walk has to put one foot in front of the next, even if a parent is holding them up. How can we practically help to make a little space for God to help us re-create our nephesh at this time? We can all be thinking about this question during the counting of the omer and sharing practical ideas. I'm going to suggest one today.

If the nephesh is the animal side of the soul, we should maybe take the same approaches to training it that we would take when training an animal, like a dog. A dog responds to punishment, for example. My suggestion is that this week we are intentional to take one small step away from whatever we sense is imbalanced in our walk when it comes to instinctual drives and appetites and emotional wellness. This might be some form of instant gratification that the culture accepts but that we know is not healthy for us. Or maybe it's something that we know is taking TIME from us that could be better spent in some other way. Don't try to take a giant leap in this area. Do something small to bring correction, but be consistent with it. This consistency is absolutely critical in training an animal. And to go even further, design a punishment for yourself for when you falter in this step, and make it something that hurts just a bit. A dog responds to a loving slap on the nose. Figure out how to slap yourself on the nose when you drop the ball in the area you've selected for improvement, and stick to that punishment, too.

Again, as we set about doing, remember that the source of victory is not in ourselves but rests on the work of the Lamb and God's gracious act of deliverance, God raising us up to a higher level. Can we feel that? Probably not. So we have to trust. It starts with trusting Him for this. And from that point, we show Him our hearts however we can. We show Him our faith. And we keep trusting and taking steps.

There will be a time later in the year when the emotions are deeply engaged in a holy way, the writing of the Torah on the heart. We can say that at that time, the emotions are filled with the Spirit of God via the Torah of God written on them. But we're not there yet. On this side of the calendar, we focus on cleansing the emotions. The work of the moment now is to walk with God in bringing some correction to the emotions, as we know the vessel must be cleansed before it can be filled with the Spirit, because the Spirit requires a holy vessel.

### **Nadav and Avihu**

Let's take some time now to talk about Nadav and Avihu and see if we can connect them into this conversation. My first point here is that the deaths of Nadav and Avihu are one of these examples of how God is very strict at the beginning of a major stage of development. This is a kindness to us because if the embryo doesn't form properly, the whole process of development

will be affected. The leaven of the world is not allowed in at the beginning because it will have a vast influence later. Nadav and Avihu's innovation in worshiping God here was leaven, and it had to be dealt with harshly in the moment for the good of the nation. If they would have been allowed to transgress God's boundaries at that point, then there would be no boundaries moving forward. Instead, their deaths became a great source of motivation to stay exactly within God's Torah regarding the service at the Tabernacle that is so critical for Israel to draw near to God. This was the formation moment of this vast realm of connection to God. These formative moments had to be done right. Last week we connected Ananias and Saphira to this idea of walking carefully in such formative moments.

Beyond this lesson about strictness at the beginning, a second point I want to suggest here is that maybe Nadav and Avihu were created for exactly this moment. Maybe this was the fulfillment of their lives, what they were designed for. One clue that points us in that direction is the fact that we are told in a couple of places in Scripture that, somewhat strangely, Nadav and Avihu both had no children. In Numbers 3, it says, "But Nadav and Avihu died before the LORD when they offered unauthorized fire before the LORD in the wilderness of Sinai, and they had no children. So Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests in the lifetime of Aaron their father" (Numbers 3:4). Could it be that God prevented them from marrying and having children because He had created them for a different purpose? It is a great lesson that God teaches through these two men, a lesson that helps to keep a generation on the straight path. In Romans 9, Paul says that God raised Pharaoh up to show His power, and he says that the pot has no right to rise up and ask the potter why it was made as it was and that the potter has the right to take one lump of clay and use half to make a vessel for honorable use and the other half a vessel for dishonorable use.

The deaths of these men seems harsh, but a child is prone to accusing the parents of being unfair because the child does not have the capacity to understand yet. If you're smacked on the hand right now, be especially quick to accept that it's for the best somehow. Understanding how God is working is not the highest priority right now.

A final point here about Nadav and Avihu is that they teach us something about MISPLACED ZEAL, and this is another connection to the idea of taming the animal soul, including the emotions. A child is filled with zeal but doesn't always channel it in kosher ways. They have to be taught how to do this. In their discussions of Nadav and Avihu, the Sages bring forth the common thread that these two had a great hunger to worship God, to draw near to Him. In their enthusiasm, they offered a "strange fire" to the Lord. Grant in a previous Shemini teaching ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojl7Rk5ur\\_Q&list=PLsc9G96-XmdBTpab6H\\_38jQroEbo8JyVR&index=26](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojl7Rk5ur_Q&list=PLsc9G96-XmdBTpab6H_38jQroEbo8JyVR&index=26)) points out that fire is connected to emotion and passion and zeal. Zeal is great, but it needs to be kept within the boundaries of Torah truth; otherwise, it will result in death.

I've bumped into quite a few Believers who are filled with zeal but whose motivations for doing the work of the Lord seem slightly off. In the end, when you see some of the fruit, you just end up deciding it's a strange zeal, a strange fire that's somehow missing the mark. These Believers often prove to be unstable in their walks, in their lives in general. Sometimes this strange zeal is

an openness to worshipping God in an unorthodox way that seems to lack self-control. Sometimes it's the idea that they should hear from God about every little detail in life, like what they should wear today, for example. Maybe the root of their attraction to Torah is really founded on an attraction to Jewish culture. Maybe it's a vast zeal for pointing fingers at the declining culture or other Believers. Maybe it's a single issue that they become so attached to that it causes separation with others, an issue like certain calendar disagreements or the use of extra-biblical sources or how we should approach the Jewish scholarship over the centuries or what has become of the Lost Tribes of Israel. Each of these issues deserves some thought, but they shouldn't become all-consuming. When these things tip into imbalance, the flesh is too much present, and often the attention ends up getting placed on the person inappropriately when we are to be bringing glory to God, not ourselves. There are many ways to trip in this walk of the Believer. Let's pay attention to what is driving us and filling us with passion. When that passion causes us to act outside of God's instructions, it leads to instability and death.

Grant points out that to our eyes, fire just looks like fire – it's all the same to us, but it's not to God. There is such a thing as holy fire, and so there is also common fire. Offering to God requires holy fire. The fire that burns on the bronze altar is holy, and that is to be where fire for offering incense is to be taken from, not from the home or from some other common place. There is a holy zeal and there is a zeal that is not completely set apart for God.

We are all guilty of misplaced zeal to some degree. We need to be able to delicately and lovingly speak into each others' lives about such matters, and we need to be humble to receive that correction.

### **Kashrut – the Food Laws**

Let's take a moment now to touch on the question of what the laws of clean and unclean foods are doing here. In Hebrew, these laws are referred to as "kashrut." This sudden list of kosher foods jumps out of the text at us because of how out-of-place they seem. We know that nothing is out-of-place in the Torah.

Let me suggest that we find these laws here because they are a mirror reflection of the laws of the korbanot that we read about in previous portions, the sacrificial system. The laws of the korbanot are laws of worship, and worship is spiritual and very high; making a sacrifice is quite obviously a spiritual activity. In a way, the korbanot are focused on giving food to God, and that "food" is ourselves. WE are the sacrifice. On the other side, kashrut is not about GIVING our lives but PRESERVING them by taking in food. The laws of kashrut are focused on self-preservation rather than self-sacrifice. The two sets of laws compliment each other, and both are foundational for spiritual and physical health. The korbanot are spiritual first and physical second. We can say that eating food is physical first and spiritual second. It's less obvious how eating is a spiritual activity, though it is. These two sets of laws seem so very different, but both are foundational to the idea of transcending, the number 8, shemini. [consider: Tazria-Metzorah is perhaps also a part of the reflected image of the korbanot]

Let's talk about the great power of kashrut for a minute. It might not seem like it, but the dietary laws are fundamental in the life of the Believer. I would have never thought this twenty years ago. But since then I've learned that these laws have a great power to help us keep our spiritual vision clear and to gain self-control and even to witness to others. The rabbis say that when we eat unclean foods, a kind of spiritual foginess comes over us. And too, these laws are "chukim," laws that don't readily make sense to us. We have learned before that such laws in particular that go beyond our ability to understand carry a special kind of power to them. Our obedience to these laws is less hindered by our need to understand. So, in a way, our obedience to this kind of law is based on simple faith, the faith of a child, and there is a kind of work that such obedience does in us to separate us from the world and from man's constant desire to understand before doing. And these laws in particular are pervasive in our lives, as pervasive as food is in our day. Keeping any Torah law will help us to grow our self-control, but these that deal with food crop up on a simple trip to the store or when ordering food from a restaurant or when eating at a friend's house. They are present for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. It's interesting, too, that these are the laws that friends who don't understand that Torah is for today tend to sneer at. But in keeping them unapologetically, we are sowing seeds in others.

As we take first steps in the year at a higher level, it's appropriate to be reading about and studying such a foundational topic for our walks with the Lord. You are what you eat, as they say. Much that we are and do is built on our diets. And so, elevating the mundane topic of food to the level of holiness is a great gift God is giving us. If God hadn't given us these laws, we would just eat. But since He has, everything we eat now becomes a choice to be holy. And through these laws, He has shown us how the animals reflect His mind. Through the dietary laws, the world of the animals that had been opaque now begins to become transparent as it speaks its message. We begin to see the light of God streaming through the whole animal kingdom in a profound way, though we can only scratch the surface. Certain animals live off of death and decay and are not suitable for a holy people to eat. They are created for common purposes, for cleaning up the earth, for example. God created other animals for higher purposes, and they graze and do not live off the death or decay of other animals. They are clean.

### **Yeshua**

Let's turn more directly to Yeshua now. We've been mentioning Yeshua along the way, but I'd like to add one more topic here regarding Yeshua. The "ultimate eight," the ultimate transcendence of the natural order is what we await with the return of the Messiah, but not right away. We read about the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> millenia of human history in the final chapters of the book of Revelation. It would seem that at Yeshua's return, first comes the period of the thousand year reign, which is the 7<sup>th</sup> millenium of human history. At that time, only some are resurrected to reign with the Messiah, and the enemy is locked up; it is, therefore, a time of peace on earth, like the Sabbath is in the week. The Sabbath is a taste of heaven, but it remains part of the natural 7-day cycle. So this 7<sup>th</sup> millenium of Yeshua's reign would seem to be a time of peace among mankind but not yet a vastly different planet where the supernatural is the norm. Again, seven is the completion of the natural order. Eight begins the supernatural. We don't come to a supernatural kind of clarity and widespread miracle until the 8<sup>th</sup> millenium. At



the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> millenium, the enemy is released from prison for a time, and the nations are deceived. They come against Jerusalem and are defeated with fire from heaven. The enemy is thrown into the lake of fire, all of mankind is resurrected and judged, and finally we see the new heaven and the new earth, a whole new order wherein there is a flipping of the natural order and the revelation of the Divine. God will be obvious, and the natural order beneath will be less obvious.

### **Joshua 18-19**

Lastly today, let's turn to Joshua chapters 18-19. In these chapters, the final 7 tribes receive their land. In the previous chapters, five tribes had already been given their inheritances, Judah in the south, Ephraim and Manasseh in the center of the nation, and Reuben and Gad east of the Jordan.

I want to focus on 18:3, where we see that Israel has been reluctant to take the land God has given them. Verse 3 reads, "So Joshua said to the people of Israel, 'How long will you put off going in to take possession of the land, which the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you?'" (Joshua 18:3). The word here for "put off" is "mitrapim," from the root "raphah," which means "slack/to sink down/to relax." So the word carries in it the idea of movement in a physical direction – downward.

We learn a lesson here that adds to our discussion of transcendence. Remember that transcendence is a going up, but it's a going up that involves reaching down low and grabbing hold of the physical and gaining control over it, cleansing it, and using it for spiritual purposes, which raises the physical up. It's about the spirit flowing through the holy physical vessel. The tribes are being given just this opportunity at this point in Joshua. They are being given the chance to take hold of the physical body, the Land, the portions allotted to them. And if they can do that and finish cleaning it out, they can start being a light to the nations. They can use that physical vessel for spiritual purposes.

But fear is causing them to hesitate. What we learn here, though, is that when we are offered the chance to transcend and we hesitate, it's not just that we fail to move up; we actually slip down. Joshua says to them, "How long will you be mitrapim? How long will you sink downward?" Sinking downward is the opposite of transcendence.

What are we here for? We are here to overcome this flesh, to transcend. Let this example in Joshua be a warning to us that **IF WE ARE NOT RISING UP, WE ARE SLIPPING DOWNWARD**. There is no staying in one place. We're either climbing or we're falling.

Well, that's going to have to be all for today. May God bless each of us in these critical moments of new light when He is lifting us upward. May we first of all trust that He is doing this redemption now, and may we rise up to the calling. May we trust Him when He says that we can change because the price has already been paid for that change. And may we rise up to be the people He has created us to be. Shalom.