

## PARSHAT SHEMINI: WHAT DOES AARON TEACH US ABOUT LOSS?

This guide corresponds to the video: [What Does Aaron Teach Us About Loss?](#)

### SABBATH TABLE OUTLINE

- I. This week's parsha contains the famous story of the deaths of the two sons of Aaron - Nadav and Avihu - during the consecration of the Tabernacle procedure when they bring incense in a way that wasn't commanded
- A fire comes from the Holy of Holies, consuming them
  - A tragic event that many have tried to understand
  - This is the topic of last year's Parshat Shemini video



- II. Right now, would like to focus on a very obscure story that takes place right afterwards - right after the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, there was a sin offering brought in the Tabernacle

- a) A dispute erupts between Moses and the two surviving sons of Aaron

1. Moses says that it wasn't offered properly

- b) Aaron comes to their defense and says that it was

1. They talk about these really arcane laws

2. Why are they even discussing this?

- There was this terrible tragedy
- Who even cares about this?

3. Also, placement of the story seems so strange

- Why are we debating sacrificial law now, after these deaths?

- c) If you look carefully at the story, that's actually what the story's about



- III. Paradigm introduced in Parshat Vayikra about how to understand three basic types of offerings

- a) Chatat is a sin offering – and it is contrasted with the olah offering and the burnt offering

1. An olah goes entirely to God

2. A chatat is partially consumed by the priests

3. What is the tension between these offerings?

- b) In order to understand a chatat, you have to go back

to the first great sin of humanity - the eating of the forbidden fruit

1. God had given a world of paradise to humanity

- But we didn't go for any of the trees from which we were permitted
- We only wanted from the one tree we couldn't have

2. The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was the Master's tree

- The desire to eat from it, on some level, was the desire to play God and pretend to be the Master of the garden
- That was the first transgression



3. Later on, when the Torah is given, the Torah introduces other things that are off limits

- By extension, in each one of these negative commandments, there is a little bit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil
- There is the sense that by honoring those commands, we are honoring God's sovereignty
- It's His world, so we honor His restrictions
- We show that we're guests in this great garden that God has given us



4. What happens when you inadvertently transgress one of the commandments?

- An imbalance has been introduced into your relationship with God

c) With a chatat, you try, symbolically, to rebalance the scale

1. Going back to the paradigmatic Garden of Eden, you ate from something that was out of bounds that was in God's world, so you give something back to God to be eaten



- God doesn't have a mouth to eat, but that's why the priests are there
- The priests eat the eat from the offering on His behalf

2. It will bring balance back to the relationship



IV. The olah is the inverse of the chatat

a) If the impetus for the chatat is that I crossed over into God's domain, and there is one special thing for God, and I took that one special thing, the impetus for an olah is that in my domain, there is one special thing that is mine, but I abandon that and give it to God

1. Everything is God's
2. In Parshat Vayikra, we discussed the Binding of Isaac as the great paradigm for olahs

b) What is the one special thing you have? Your child

1. God didn't take Isaac in the end, but that was the sense of abandonment (Genesis 22:12)
2. Nothing is mine, even that which appears to be most mine



V. Now, back to our story, does this remind you of anything?

- a) They had given everything, that which was most theirs
- b) God had taken them, and Aaron had been silent
- c) In his silence, Aaron had touched that energy of awe and abandonment

VI. Going to the text to read the dispute (Leviticus 10:16-17)

a) Just after the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, a sin offering is offered in the Tabernacle on behalf of the entire community

1. But it wasn't offered properly



2. It was entirely burned (as if it were an olah)
- b) Moses asked why they didn't eat the meat
  1. He is making a point about how a sin offering works
  2. It is taken in by God's domain, and then the priests eat it to bring atonement
- c) The priests are being called upon to restore the boundaries
  1. Those boundaries had been violated in the sin
  2. With the eating of the sin offering, the circle is closed, and boundary is restored
  3. The ones who illegitimately ate from what should have been God's are now giving something back for God to eat, and the priests restore that boundary
  4. But what had these priests done?



- Eleazar and Itamar lived through the complete opposite energy of the sin offering, and they end up treating this offering not as a burnt offering
  - They didn't eat the meat
  - They felt that they couldn't take it on behalf of God somehow
  - Yes, they were priests, but they were also human beings
    - They had experienced utter loss and abandonment
    - No boundaries whatsoever
- d) If you're Aaron, grappling with unspeakable loss, you question the concept of boundaries
    1. All you can do is to stand still and allow things to happen
      - That's the energy of an olah
      - That's what they had gone through
    2. That's Aaron's response to Moses (Leviticus 10:19-20)
    3. Aaron and his sons could not eat a sin offering on behalf of God



- VII. A priest is a representative of the Divine on one hand, but he is also a human on the other hand
  - a) Sometimes those spiritual energies collide
  - b) This was one instance in which they did
    1. The role of a high priest almost always eclipses the role as an individual, but not always
    2. For one moment, Aaron the human had to eclipse Aaron the high priest

