

Clarity, lucidity of thought, and decisiveness are necessary to be able to distinguish between the sacred and the profane



THIS IS a good time for strengthening deep family relationships: Gedalyahu family, 1948, Petah Tikva. (Illustrative; Wikimedia Commons)

PARASHAT SHMINI  
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## Clarity and lucidity of a spiritual leader

Unfortunately, we will not be hearing this week's Torah portion, Shmini, in our synagogues. All of humanity shares a common sense of anxiety and concern as we follow the news of the pandemic's victims. This is a challenging time for all of us.

During Passover, which we just celebrated, we tried to be joyous and experience the eternal values this festival teaches us, and now we go back to weekdays and to praying for a return to routine. We share in the deep sorrow of those who lost loved ones, and wish a speedy and easy recovery to those who have fallen ill, and hope and pray wholeheartedly for health, serenity and complete redemption.

In this week's parasha, we read about a tragedy that occurred during one of the foundational moments in Jewish history. This tragedy happened on the day the *Mishkan*, the Tabernacle, was established – the temporary temple that accompanied the Children of Israel on their wanderings through the desert – after Aaron sacrificed the special sacrifices of the day and blessed the nation. Two of his sons sinned. They entered the Holy of Holies – which was prohibited – and burned *ketoret* (incense). The response was severe: Aaron's two sons died immediately. The nation's joy abruptly turned to deep grief.

Immediately following the description of the tragic death of Aaron's sons, we read the following command:

“And the Lord spoke to Aaron, saying, Do not drink wine that will lead to intoxication, neither you nor

your sons with you, when you go into the Tent of Meeting, so that you shall not die... to distinguish between holy and profane and between unclean and clean, and to instruct the Children of Israel regarding all the statutes....” (Leviticus 10: 8-11).

The connection between the tragedy and the command is clear. The sons of Aaron did not distinguish enough between the holy and the profane. They entered a holy place and did what they wanted to do. Those acts were essentially positive ones, but their acts defiled the sacred. Now, a special command was needed for the kohanim to prevent defilement of the sacred. The kohanim have a significant role, and they must distinguish between the sacred and the profane, and between the pure and impure.

In the ancient social structure of the Jewish nation, the kohanim had two jobs. One is well known: to serve in the Temple and offer sacrifices for the nation. The second job is less familiar, and is mentioned in the verses quoted above: “to instruct the Children of Israel regarding all the statutes that the Lord has spoken to them through Moses.”

At the end of the Book of Deuteronomy, in Moses's parting words from the tribes of Israel, he describes these two roles: “They shall teach Your ordinances to Jacob, and Your Torah to Israel; they shall place incense before You, and burnt offerings upon Your altar.”

Clarity, lucidity of thought, and decisiveness are necessary to be able to distinguish between the sacred and the profane. They are also necessary when study-

ing anything, and certainly when studying the laws of the Torah. Sometimes controlling one's emotions are necessary in order to examine a situation and determine how to act. But sometimes the reverse is true and it is appropriate to weigh the emotional implications in making a decision. Making a halachic (Jewish law) decision is a profession requiring not only skill but also, and perhaps mainly, clarity and lucidity of thought.

The kohanim were what we would call today spiritual leaders. And that is true not only of the kohanim. We are all spiritual leaders of our children and of others. We act as role models.

This is a responsibility especially nowadays, when families are sheltering together at home. We are all trying to get through this time in peace, health and serenity. This period of time can also be a time of positivity. This is a good time for creating and strengthening deep relationships within the family, of a couple, between parents and children. This can be a time for studying and talking with children. For this we need composure. Our first obligation now, in addition to being careful and keeping the regulations mandated by the authorities, is to be leaders, to take responsibility and lead our families during this time of crisis.

All of us feel that our ship is rocking. It is up to us to sail it carefully until, with God's help, we safely reach shore.

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## The inauguration of Judaism 1.0

• GOL KALEV

This week's parasha describes the inauguration of the Tabernacle, which occurred a year after the Exodus from Egypt. That year was marked by various attempts to identify the appropriate conduit for connection with God.

Shortly after crossing the sea, in Marah, there was an attempt that might have been too abstract: “There He made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there He proved them.” This was followed by an attempt at Mount Sinai, which might have been too direct – a nationwide prophetic communication with God: “There was thunder and lightning and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of a horn exceeding loud; and all the people that were in the camp trembled.” This was evidently too much for the people, who pleaded with Moses: “Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”

But when Moses went up Mount Sinai to do exactly that and receive the Torah, the people downstairs engaged in their own attempt – the making of a physical object as a conduit for their communication with God.

The events of the Golden Calf demonstrated that the people were not yet ready for a connection that is too abstract or too direct. A new route was apparently needed to be calculated. Indeed, Upon Moses's second descent from Mount Sinai, he informed the nation of that new route: the construction of the Tabernacle.

Over the next six months, the people over-donated items toward its construction, building it precisely to the specification conveyed by Moses, which he received from God.

This time it worked. The Tabernacle provided an interface to connect with God that had the user-experience suitable to the state of the nation. After a year of trial and error, the Hebrews built a Tabernacle, so that God can dwell within them.

FOR THE next 1,000 years, they would engage in the ritual of sacrifices in the Tabernacle and the Temple that replaced it. A high point of the animal sacrifice was a smell that emerged. That smell might have been a tool for the sacrificer to absorb the presence of God. The Bible describes it as *reiaich nichoch* – translated as “pleasant smell,” but this could possibly also be read as “smell of presence” (spelled differently, but such spelling discrepancies are common in the Bible). At the end of the long, cumbersome and rather uncomfortable process of animal sacrifices, comes that smell that enables the sacrificer and those around him to internalize the presence of God.

Indeed, the Tabernacle and then the Temple were the conduit to connect to God, and a point-of-orientation to one's Judaism. The Tabernacle stood right in the center of the formation of the tribes, maximizing its visibility and epitomizing its centrality to the wandering nation in the desert. Similarly, when the permanent Temple was built by King Solomon in its place, it rose to 120 cubits, as told in the Books of Chronicles (estimated to be roughly 60 meters). Therefore, it was likely seen from afar, underscoring its role as a central focal point of the Jewish nation.

The Temple lasted physically for about 1,000 years, and continued to live in the dreams and prayers of the Jews for the next 2,000 years while in exile. One dreamer described the Temple in his utopian vision



(Wikimedia Commons)

After a year of trial-and-error, the Hebrews built a Tabernacle – so that God could dwell within them

for the renewed days: “The Temple will be visible from long distances, for it is only our ancient faith that has kept us together.” Indeed, for a 1,000 years, the Temple provided the tangible manifestation of Judaism for the Jew, regardless whether he actually worshipped there or not. It was the anchor that has kept the Jews together. Hence, when the Romans destroyed the Temple, they destroyed Judaism's anchor.

Other nations that lost their anchor have evaporated, but Judaism stunningly did not. Instead it transformed, adopting a new anchor – Rabbinical Judaism, centered around Halacha (Jewish Law) and the canonization of the Oral Torah. The prayers replaced the sacrifices, the synagogues replaced the Temple, the insular ghetto – physical or virtual – replaced the insular life in Judea, and the yearning to return to Zion, replaced the actual presence in Jerusalem.

Yet, this anchor of Judaism 2.0, has also faded. Over the last 150 years, the walls that confined the ghetto have crumbled and mass secularization of the Jews ensued. Yet once again, a historic transformation of Judaism is occurring.

THE INAUGURATION of the State of Israel on the fifth of Iyar is akin to the inauguration of the Tabernacle on the first of Nissan – the beginning of a new era of Judaism.

Just as back then, the Jews' primary vehicle to connect to God and to Judaism was through the Temple, today, it is through the Jewish State. After 2,000 years without a tangible conduit, Judaism now has one: the State of Israel.

Zionism, the national expression of the Jewish nation-religion, has turned into the new anchor of Judaism. It is increasingly becoming the primary manner through which Jews meet their Judaism – both in the positive and negative. It has also become the main prism through which the outside world relates to the Jews, just as the Temple was back then.

The concept of “light to the nations” is rooted in the Temple. This is evident in the prophecies of Isaiah

and description of the Temple in the Book of Kings. Perhaps it is in this context that the Egyptians “lent” their goods to the Hebrews shortly before the Exodus. The Bible stresses twice that it was a loan, even though it also makes clear that the exit from Egypt was permanent. We are told that the Egyptians viewed the Hebrews with favor, and therefore lent them jewels of silver, jewels of gold, and raiment. It would seem logical, that those items were among the massive stock that the Hebrews donated toward the construction of the Tabernacle six months later; it even fits the description. The Temple that succeeded the Tabernacle served as a beacon to the nations, including to Egypt. Hence, perhaps those items were merely a “loan” that were repaid upon their donation to the instrument that would beam light to Egypt and could provide the blessing their King requested.

In our time, Zionism has turned into this beacon. Through technological advances, medical breakthrough and cutting-edge social innovations, it sends blessings to the nations. Indeed, It serves in the role that the Temple previously did – as a light to the nations.

That light was beaming this Passover from the site of the Temple, as 10 priests, including American Ambassador David Freedman, conveyed the Passover priestly blessing from the Western Wall right into people's homes via YouTube. It was also beaming on the Passover Seder: Israelis celebrating in solitude, due to corona restrictions, took to their balconies at a pre-arranged time at 8:30 p.m. and joined together as one in song and prayer. An estimated 93% of Israeli Jews observe the Seder annually, recounting God's miracles taking us out of Egypt. This underscores that in this third era of Judaism, Jews are not only beaming light outwards, but indeed have an effective and relevant conduit for their own connection to Judaism.

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