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בס"ד

Parashat Shemini Part I Leviticus 9

1. Introduction

In Leviticus 8 the Torah detailed the fulfillment of the seven-day rites of priestly ordination and pointed out that they were performed in accordance with the instructions Hashem had commanded Moshe (mostly transmitted in Exodus 29). With the public summoned to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, Moshe had Aharon and his sons washed and dressed in their appropriate priestly vestments then sanctified them and their garments as well as the Tabernacle and its articles. He offered the relevant sacrifices, carried out the atonement services for the new priests and for the sacrificial altar* and performed several other rituals. He instructed the priests to remain in the area of the entrance to the Tent of Meeting for seven days, day and night and concluded his instructions on the note of how vital it was to be careful with sanctuary details, “and you shall guard Hashem’s charge that you not die, for thus was I commanded” (Lev. 8:35). (The gravity of deviation was illustrated in the Nadab and Abihu narrative shortly afterwards.) Chapter 8 concludes with the statement that Aharon and his sons fulfilled everything according to instructions.

In the first verse of *Parashat Shemini* (9:1) Moshe summons Aharon, his sons and the elders of Israel for the ceremonial rites of the eighth day. These rites would formally dedicate the Tabernacle, officially install Aharon and his sons in their priestly positions and usher in the climax of the whole process, a public manifestation of G-d’s glory and demonstration of His acceptance of the service of Israel and its priests.

During the seven days of priestly initiation and preparation, Moshe served as priest; now, on the eighth day, Aharon and his sons officiated, the former as high priest. The day’s service included *hattat*, *olah*, *shelamim* and *minḥa*, each category of offering except *asham*, which is associated with certain specific transgressions and is never brought as a

communal offering. Although the *hattat* is a purification sacrifice also associated with certain types of wrongdoing (Lev. 4), Torah legislation widely prescribes it for various public occasions when no transgression is mentioned. This may reflect the concept that when dealing with the public a certain degree of unintentional transgression is assumed to inevitably have occurred and should be expiated, rendering cleansing from sin appropriate at all national ceremonies.

The twelve days of altar dedication ceremonies performed by the tribal chieftains also took place at this time – וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם בְּלוֹת מִזְשֶׁה לְהִקְדִּים אֶת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ... וַיִּקְרָיבוּ וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם בְּלוֹת מִזְשֶׁה לְהִקְדִּים אֶת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ... וַיִּקְרָיבוּ (“And on the day that Moshe had finished setting up the Tabernacle...the chieftains of Israel brought forth...,” Num. 7:1-2) – but their offerings were recorded in the Book of Numbers. We will soon discuss possible explanations as to why those proceedings were not narrated together with the account of our chapter. The chieftains’ offerings also included each category of sacrifice except *asham*.

It is noteworthy that the official dedicatory ceremony for the Mishkan, together with Hashem’s sign of approval, was on the eighth day; it is also noteworthy that the Torah is obviously making a major point of it. This is consistent with the number “eight” being the symbol for the Covenant as we have often pointed out (see our study *On Number Symbolism in the Torah from the Work of Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon*). This highlights the covenantal foundation of the sanctuary program. In another symbolic reflection of this concept, the compliance formula כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֶת מֹשֶׁה (“as Hashem commanded Moshe”), or an ever-slightly modified variant of it, is attested eight times in the two-chapter unit spanning the eight days. It had been attested seven times in conjunction with the initiation rites of the seven days in the previous chapter (Lev. 8:4,9,13,17,21,29,36, a detail of particular significance given that the seven days were

not narrated individually) and appears the eighth time in verse 10 of our chapter. (Moshe's usage of part of this phrase in verse 7 was a request to Aharon to comply, not a narration of compliance, and does not enter into the count.)

It should be recalled that in the Exodus section that recorded the fashioning of the priestly vestments and concluded the account of construction of the Mishkan (Ex. 39:1-32), this *אֶת מִשְׁהָ ה' צִוָּה ה' אֶת מִשְׁהָ* formula also appeared exactly eight times, indicating the people were sincerely interested in covenant renewal after the covenant nullification of the golden calf.

Furthermore, the section that follows shortly afterwards that describes the assembly of the Mishkan is comprised of eight distinct subsections (Ex. 40:17-33). Each of the first seven also concludes with *אֶת מִשְׁהָ ה' צִוָּה ה' אֶת מִשְׁהָ* and at first the reader is surprised by the incongruity of its absence in the closing of the eighth subsection, the final words of which are, "and Moshe completed the work." However, that verse directly flows into a coda that closes the Book of Exodus, and which begins with, "And the cloud covered the *Ohel Moed* and Hashem's glory filled the Mishkan" (v. 34). At the conclusion of the project, rather than repeat the expected *אֶת מִשְׁהָ ה' צִוָּה ה' אֶת מִשְׁהָ*, the Torah provided a commentary on it, informing instead that Hashem accepted their endeavors and the Covenant renewal was ratified. (See our *Parashat Pequdeh Part I* study.)

The first six verses of our *parasha* comprise an introductory subsection dealing with the preliminary procedures of the eighth day before the account of the substantial rites begins. Moshe instructs Aharon, his sons and the elders to gather all the animals and flour that will be required for the day's services. They do so and assemble before the Tent of Meeting, whereupon Moshe proclaims that the purpose of the ensuing ceremony is that Hashem's glory should appear to them. This preliminary unit contains exactly eighty words and the eightieth word is the Tetragrammaton, further highlighting the covenantal dimension.

The total number of offerings prescribed for the eighth day rites was eight: one *hattat* and one *olah* for Aharon and one *hattat*, two *olot*, two *shelamim* and one *minha* for the Israelites.

2. Linkage with the Golden Calf

Most of the directives for the seven-day initiation rites had been provided in Exodus 29, at the conclusion of instructions for Mishkan construction and priestly vestments. Several details described in the fulfillment procedures of Leviticus 8, however, had not been specified there. For instance, the command that the priests were to remain at the entrance to the *Ohel Mo'ed* for the seven days and seven nights had not been previously mentioned. When Moshe informed the priests of it, he added, "for thus was I commanded" (Lev. 8:35), alluding to the fact that it was not mentioned previously, but that it was to be understood as part and parcel of the instructions. This is not a surprising matter; it is not unusual for Moshe to reveal a detail of law that had not been mentioned as having been transmitted to him when he had previously related G-d's transmission of that subject. For instance, when relating the laws of Shabbat to the Israelites in *Parashat Vayaqhel* (Ex. 35:3), he defines making fire as a primary example of the prohibition of work on Shabbat, a matter not mentioned when G-d transmitted to him the Shabbat passage he was then relating to Israel. It also is possible that G-d revealed an additional detail to him subsequent to the previous transmission. Why a particular detail was not mentioned with the previous instructions requires explanation, an issue we are not here addressing. But this is only as regards a detail.

The eighth day ceremony, however, is more than a detail; it is the major dedication service of the Mishkan. Once it is known to have been prescribed it is clearly understood to be the culmination of the seven days of ordination as well as of the whole Mishkan enterprise. The seven preceding days are "transformed" by it into days of preparation and rehearsal. Prior to our Leviticus 9 account there was no advance indication of any aspect of the eighth day ceremony. In light of Leviticus 9, the relatively lengthy instructions concerning the seven days of priestly ordination rites prescribed in Exodus 29 seem incomplete without some reference to the ceremony that brings the whole Mishkan project to a climax. The same may be said for the last chapter of Exodus in which the priestly initiation ceremonies and anointing and sanctifying of the Mishkan and its vessels were briefly summarized without any mention of the eighth day ceremony (Ex. 40:1-16).

The reader might very well have thought that with the conclusion of the seven days' rites the priests'

installation was complete; they were then to perform the daily service without any further official ceremony specifically intended to bring revelation of the Divine presence. Any “altar inauguration” necessary beyond the seven days’ procedures may very well have been thought to be satisfied with the chieftains’ sacrifices that are described in the section that begins “And it was on the day that Moshe completed assembly of the Mishkan” (Num. 7).

Thus, the Torah treats the eighth day very differently from the seven days and why it was not alluded to previously requires a fundamental explanation.

As discussed in previous studies, there is significant evidence supporting the view that the Mishkan instructions beginning in Exodus 25 and extending through Chapter 29 were presented in chronological order; that is, they preceded the golden calf. However, the evidence that some related items and rituals were added afterwards appears compelling (particularly as concerns the incense altar and the half-sheqel atonement payment associated with the census-taking that appear in Chapter 30). It appears that in similar fashion, at some point subsequent to the golden calf episode, the eighth day dedication ceremony was added to the previously prescribed seven-day initiation procedures to enrich the program that had been prescribed prior to the transgression of covenant annulment. This is reflected in the symbolic change from the prominent use of the number 7, the previous indication of ideality and completeness (well-known from the ancient Near East, and subsequently representative of the “old order” in Israel), to the new covenantal status represented by the number 8. This is a transformation deeply embedded in the *peshat* of the Torah as we have pointed out a number of times in these studies based on Rabbi S. D. Sassoon’s work.

(An analogous explanation may be applicable to the *Shemini Asseret* festival following *Succot* that is prescribed in Leviticus 23:36 and Numbers 29:35-38. It appears that at some point it was added to the sanctuary program as an expansion of the Deuteronomy 16 prescription of a seven-day *Succot* festival. In the latter context the eighth day is not mentioned whatsoever. The purpose of *Shemini Asseret* was to subsume or transform the previous standard related to the symbolism associated with the number 7 into the new Covenantal dimension associated with the number 8. It appears that Torah

legislation that postdates the Mishkan enriched at least some Deuteronomy legislation that was formulated without the Mishkan.)

In our Leviticus passage, after prescribing the particulars for the eighth day sacrifices, Moshe states, “This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do so that the glory of Hashem may appear to you” (Lev. 9:6). This statement seems to indicate that these instructions were something separate, not part of the original Mishkan program, as Moshe referred to them as being a distinct item, *זֶה הַדָּבָר* (“this is the thing”). In addition, by not employing the past tense “as I was commanded,” as he did in conjunction with a detail of the previous seven days that he had revealed for the first time (8:35), it is more consistent with understanding the eighth day ceremony as a later addition to the earlier instructions.

Aharon’s *hattat* offering for the eighth day contains an anomaly in that he was specifically required to bring a calf for the occasion of his inauguration as high priest. This is contrary to the expected bull of the herd, which is the standard prescription for the high priest’s *hattat* sacrifice in all other cases specified in the Torah, namely, for unintentional sins (4:3), for the seven days of ordination (8:2) and for the Yom Kippur service (16:3). The Sages in *Mekhilta d’Miluim* explained that the choice of a calf was in expiation for the golden calf episode, in which Aharon had played a significant role. Many, including Maimonides (*Guide*, III:46), took this explanation as very possibly the *peshat*. The fact that no calf had been prescribed for the preceding seven days of priestly ordination further supports the view that only the eighth day ceremony was added after the golden calf, not the seven days of ordination and the greater part of the Mishkan program prescribed in Exodus 25 ff. (See our study on *Parashat Terumah Part I*.)

3. A Note on Chronology

There is a Tannaitic controversy as regards the date of the eighth day of our *parasha*, the day on which formal Mishkan service began. The Sages (*Sifre Naso* 7:145) took the eighth day to be the day the Mishkan was officially set up, the first day of the first month of the second year from the Exodus (as per Ex. 40:17). They viewed the preceding seven days of initiation to have been a time of rehearsal, preparatory for the big occasion, with the Mishkan only tentatively set up

during those days to accommodate the relevant procedures. According to them, the Chapter 8 description of the initiation procedures flashes back to a point seven days prior to the conclusion of Exodus.

Rabbi Aqiba (based on his position in BT *Succah* 25b, *Sifre Beha'alotekha* 9:19) views the eighth day as the eighth day of the month. The seven days of initiation that preceded it commenced on the day the Mishkan was first set up, the first day of the first month of the second year, the day on which the Book of Leviticus may be presumed to have opened. Ibn Ezra interprets the chronology of these days in accordance with this latter opinion.

We may add that the opening of our *parasha* with reference to the occasion as the eighth day and only that, and focuses on its ceremonies without in any manner alluding to its being Day 1 of the official Mishkan assembly, lends support to the view of Rabbi Aqiba. As the day that had long been awaited, had it been Day 1, we would have expected an acknowledgment that it was that special day (with a statement such as found in Ex. 40:17). Although there are other considerations, in *peshat*, it seems that chronological order is the preferred view for these chapters.

4. Conclusion of the Service

Upon concluding his sacrificial service of the day, Aharon blessed the people and “stepped down from having performed the *hattat*, the *olah* and the *shelamim*” (Lev. 9:22). Presumably, it was now the moment to look toward the revelation of Hashem’s glory as predicted by Moshe (vvs. 4, 6), but at that point there was no manifestation of anything special. Moshe and Aharon then entered the Tent of Meeting (v. 23) but the text does not furnish any explanation for their doing so. They exited the Tent and together blessed the people.

Some Sages (JT *Taanit* 4) suggest that this entry was to perform the incense service, a service that was required to be performed each morning and evening, but the details of which Moshe had not as yet transmitted to Aharon. However, why would the text not mention that Aharon then performed the incense service? Others view such entry as proper protocol, namely, a sign of obeisance, a bow to G-d at the conclusion of the service (see M. *Tamid* 7). But why

would the text not mention that they prostrated themselves and then exited?

Another view, focusing on the circumstance of their awaiting a Divine response, consider the most natural reason for entering the Tent at that point to be to pray that G-d should accept their service (in accordance with *Mekhilta d'Miluim*). Having performed the ritual, it was necessary to ask G-d to respond favorably. Contrary to pagan concepts of worship, Divine response to ritual is not automatic, based on human beings fulfilling procedures according to formula. Prayer to G-d was required and He would then choose to act as He saw fit.

Why was a second blessing of the people necessary, this time with Moshe’s participation? Some have assumed that Hashem’s glory was not to appear until Moshe, who had been high priest for the previous seven days, joined Aharon in the blessing. Perhaps Aharon, who played a role in the golden calf episode, was receiving his final expiation in these eighth day rites (as per the *Mekhilta*’s explanation for his bringing a calf for *hattat*), and could not as yet merit bringing about Hashem’s manifestation without Moshe joining him in prayer and blessing.

At that point, G-d’s glory appeared to the people. A fire emanated from the Tent and consumed the sacrificial articles that had been placed on the altar. Witnessing a supernatural phenomenon indicating that G-d accepted their service, the people shouted for joy and prostrated themselves.

According to the Sages who assume that our episode occurred on the first day of the first month, is this Divine manifestation the second one that appeared that day? At the end of the Book of Exodus (40:34-35), referring to the first day, it states that the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting and Hashem’s glory filled the Tabernacle and Moshe was not able to enter the Tent of Meeting because of this. Is the latter statement a brief, unelaborated reference to the manifestation described in our chapter? But Moshe and Aharon entered the Tent of meeting before the Divine manifestation occurred. It should be noted that in Exodus it did not explicitly state that the glory appeared to the people as it does here, although it is assumed.

However, if our eighth day is the eighth day from the setting up of the Mishkan, and the verse at the end of

Exodus refers to the first day, the present manifestation is a totally distinct occurrence expanding on that of the first day. And Moshe had begun to enter the Tent of Meeting that first day when Hashem had called to him.

In our context, the wording of the priestly blessing was not specified, but it is possible (as assumed in the *Sifra*) that the Priestly Blessing spelled out in Numbers 6:22-27 refers to this blessing. The mention of blessing and the revelation of Hashem's glory in our context conclude the Leviticus account of the Mishkan dedication. The Nadab and Abihu episode that is attached was unanticipated. Following it, Leviticus turns to its legislative program and does not return to the subject of the inauguration. Hence, when the account of Mishkan dedication was to resume in the Book of Numbers with the altar inauguration ceremonies of the chieftains, the appropriate subject with which to introduce the resumption was the priestly blessing that had concluded the inauguration ceremonies in Leviticus. The appearance of the Priestly Blessing in Numbers is unanticipated and signaled that a new subject is beginning. The account of the chieftains' offerings that began "on the day that Moshe had finished setting up the Tabernacle" (Num. 7:1) immediately followed.

Why was the account of Mishkan dedication seemingly curtailed by omitting the account of the chieftains' altar inauguration offerings, which took place during the same time frame? Why was it not resumed in Leviticus? Perhaps the explanation is that priestly consecration was critical to the sanctuary program; once the account of it was concluded, Leviticus moved on with its all-important agenda. The chieftains, members of the nobility and the political leaders, were not critical to the purpose of the sanctuary so their role was deferred. In other words, the nobility and political leaders were de-emphasized, if not demoted from what their status had previously been. This is consistent with the *hattat* legislation of

Leviticus 4. There, it is specified that for a transgression of the anointed priest as well as for that of the congregation (under the aegis of the elders), a bull is brought. Both of these require the elaborate purification procedures of sprinkling from the sacrifice's blood on the *parokhet* curtain and the two altars and incinerating the carcass outside the camp. For a chieftain's transgression, however, only a goat with standard rites is prescribed.

Another possibility is that the account of the chieftains' dedicatory offerings may have been omitted in Leviticus because, after the tragedy of Nadab and Abihu, it would have been indelicate to continue narration of the joyous ceremony. The Torah moved on with its agenda and returned to it at the appropriate time. In our study on *Parashat Naso Part II* we will revisit this issue and adduce support for the first explanation.

Endnote

* Aharon and his sons may have required *kapara* for whatever sins they may have committed in the past, providing them a clean slate upon assuming the priesthood. But what does atonement for the newly established sacrificial altar – and only for that article, not for the Tabernacle itself or for any other of its furnishings – represent? Perhaps it symbolized atonement for the Israelites' sinful sacrificing on various altars in the past, in whatever context it was. Of course, the golden calf comes to mind, but these atonement prescriptions are also mentioned in Exodus 29 as part of the main sanctuary instructional section, which very likely preceded the golden calf (a position we will reinforce in discussing the ritual of the eighth day). In Leviticus 17:7 mention is made of the *se'irim* (goat-demons) that the Israelites had been wont to sacrifice to.