

שמיני

SHEMINI/EIGHTH

Vayikra/Leviticus 9:1-11:47

“Shemini” means “eighth” and refers to the day on which Aharon and his sons were inducted as the priests of the Sanctuary. The entire community will have involvement and we can only imagine the excitement and anticipation as “**all the congregation drew near**” and waited for the appearance of the glory of יהוה:

Vayikra/Leviticus 9:3 "And to the children of Israel you shall speak, saying, 'Take a kid of the goats as a sin offering, and a calf and a lamb, *both* of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering, ⁴ also a bull and a ram as peace offerings, to sacrifice before יהוה, and a grain offering mixed with oil; **for today יהוה will appear to you.**' " ⁵ So they brought what Moshe commanded before the tabernacle of meeting. And **all the congregation drew near** and stood before יהוה.

It must have been a phenomenal worship service, but it was immediately followed by a frightening incident:

Vayikra 9:23 And Moshe and Aharon went into the tabernacle of meeting, and came out and blessed the people. Then the **glory of יהוה appeared to all the people,** ²⁴ and fire came out from before יהוה and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. **When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.**

Vayikra 10:1 Then Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon, each took his censer and put fire in it, put **incense** on it, and offered **strange fire** before יהוה, which He had not commanded them.

² So **fire went out from יהוה and devoured them,** and **they died before יהוה.**

We don't have all the details of why this happened. There is no evidence that Nadav and Avihu had wrong intentions. The “**incense**” was likely proper. All we know is that it was “**strange fire.**”

The Hebrew word for “strange” is “zuwr” (זוּר). The word means to “**be strange, to be a stranger, or to become alienated.**” A “stranger” was not allowed to eat anything “**holy.**” Again, like the “**strange fire,**” there can be no mixing of the “strange” with the “**holy**”:

Shemot/Exodus 29:33 "They shall eat those things with which the atonement was made, to consecrate *and* to sanctify them; but a **stranger** (zuwr - זוּר) **shall not eat them,** because **they are holy.**

One who is a “stranger” is not “**holy,**” therefore, he is not allowed into the “**holy**” Presence of the Almighty or to eat of that which is “**holy.**” After completely consuming the two sons of Aharon, יהוה makes it clear that anyone who comes near Him must treat Him as “**holy**”:

Vayikra 10:3 And Moshe said to Aharon, "This is what יהוה spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified.' " So Aharon held his peace.

So here is the question...do I, do you, set the Almighty apart as “**holy**?” The “**incense**” we offer Him may be proper...the motive of our hearts may even be real...but are we faithful in our walk with Him according to the dictates of His Word? Do we think we can get away with a little compromise with this world? Do we make our own decisions as to what kind of worship is appropriate? Do we look like the world, or can we honestly say we are “**set apart**” ... i.e., “**holy**”?

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

In **chapter 10** of **Vayikra**, the Torah begins to “**teach**” the children of Israel how to “**distinguish between the holy and the common,**” the “**clean and the unclean.**” Based on the tragic events that preceded this command, it seems obvious that Nadav and Avihu fell short in making this distinction and did not recognize the “**holiness**” of יהוה:

Vayikra 10:10 "You must distinguish between holy and the common, and between unclean and clean, ¹¹ "and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which יהוה has spoken to them by the hand of Moshe."

As the serving priests begin their duties, much of their beginning teaching on the concepts of “**holiness**” and what is “**clean**” will center around what יהוה has declared to be food for the children of Israel and what they may not eat.

Vayikra 11:1 Now יהוה spoke to Moshe and Aharon, saying to them, ² "Speak to the children of Israel, saying, 'These *are* the animals which you may eat among all the animals that *are* on the earth... ⁴⁶ ' This *is* the Torah of the animals and the birds and every living creature that moves in the waters, and of every creature that creeps on the earth, ⁴⁷ 'to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten.'



Something about what is declared to be food connects with the unseen spiritual realm. But just because we cannot see the real effects and the consequences of eating something declared “**unclean,**” that does not minimize the importance of His commandment. For what is “**unseen**” is “**eternal**”:

2 Corinthians 4:18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.

The priests are the spiritual leaders of the community, with two main functions – to offer the people’s sacrifices, and to educate the children of Israel in the Torah. The priests are to instruct the people as to which foods are capable of making them “**spiritually unhealthy,**” which in turn prevent them from

being “**holy**.” Yes, יהוה makes it clear that our ability to have a right relationship with Him is so specific, that it is even affected by the food we eat. When we are aware of what we are eating, we are constantly being reminded that we are a “**holy/set apart**” people serving a “**holy**” Elohim! I’m sure you’ve noticed that when you keep the food laws, this really bothers people!

Now we’ve all heard this question before...But, didn’t Yeshua declare all foods clean?

It is often taught in the Christian community that since Yeshua came, we are free to eat anything we desire and are no longer bound by the dietary laws of the Torah. These ideas are basically from several verses taken out of context in the Brit Chadasha. For a study guide covering these controversial verses, Natan Lawrence has written “[The Heart & Spirit Behind the Biblical Kosher Laws](#).”

Two times in our Torah reading, we see יהוה’s command to put a “**distinction**” (בָּדַל – badal) between things. The first time we see this word, the separations are in order to “**teach the children of Israel**”:

Vayikra 10:10 "that you may distinguish (בָּדַל – badal) between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean, ¹¹ "and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which יהוה has spoken to them by the hand of Moshe."

The word (בָּדַל – badal) occurs later again in chapter 11 in regard to food:

Vayikra 11:47 'to distinguish (בָּדַל – badal) between the unclean and the clean, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten.' "

Later in Vayikra, בָּדַל appears three times in three consecutive verses:

Vayikra 20:24 'But I have said to you, "You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey." I *am* יהוה your Elohim, who has separated (בָּדַל – badal) you from the peoples. ²⁵ 'You shall therefore distinguish (בָּדַל – badal) between clean animals and unclean, between unclean birds and clean, and you shall not make yourselves abominable by beast or by bird, or by any kind of living thing that creeps on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean. ²⁶ 'And you shall be holy to Me, for I יהוה *am* holy, and have separated (בָּדַל – badal) you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.

“יהוה our Elohim’s” motive in “**separating (בָּדַל – badal)**” the Israelites was to distinguish them from all the other peoples. In verse 26 He declares very clearly that because they are “**separated (בָּדַל – badal)**” they must live “**holy for He is holy**.” Therefore, Israel is called to make a clear separation (בָּדַל – badal) between what is clean and what is unclean. Israelites are called to not only hear and study the Torah, but to actively keep the commandments of יהוה.

James 1:22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Our diet plays an enormous role in helping us with the discipline necessary in keeping us set-apart to the Holy One and **separate** (בָּדַל – badal) from the ways of this world:

Ephesians 5:7 Therefore do not be partakers with them. ⁸ For **you were once darkness, but now you are light in Adonai. Walk as children of light** ⁹ (for the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), ¹⁰ finding out what is acceptable to Adonai. ¹¹ And **have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness**, but rather expose *them*.

We are to “walk as children of light,” separating ourselves from the “darkness.” It was the Creator who first “separated (בָּדַל – badal)” the “light from the darkness”:

Bereshith/Genesis 1:4 And Elohim saw the light, that *it was* good; and Elohim **separated (בָּדַל – badal) the light from the darkness.**

Now as believers equipped with the set-apart, Holy Spirit, it is up to **us** to “separate” ourselves from the “darkness”:

1 Peter 2:9 But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you **out of darkness into His marvelous light**

Ephesians 5:8 For **you were once darkness, but now you are light in Adonai. Walk as children of light**

2 Corinthians 6:17 Therefore "Come out from among them and **be separate**, says Adonai. **Do not touch what is unclean**, And I will receive you."

Now to go one step farther, let's consider that יהוה desires us to not only be living a “clean” and set-apart, holy life as individuals, but it is also important to Him that His set-apart people live together in “unity.” We are to be the united and unified body of Israel. Today Israel is fragmented. The Jewish camp acknowledges that the gentile nations can be a part of יהוה's promises – that is if they convert and accept His Torah. The Christian camp acknowledges that all can be saved – that is if they convert and accept ‘Jesus’ into their hearts.

This lack of “unity” was never our Heavenly Father's desire. As believers in Messiah who have been awakened to the teachings of Yeshua, we must stay true to our Heavenly Father's constitution – His Torah. We must not compromise:

Devarim 5:32 "Therefore you shall be careful to do as יהוה your Elohim has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.

While there needs to be “unity” between Christians and Messianic believers, there needs to be “unity” within the Hebrew Roots community first! We are greatly at fault here!

Psalm 133:1 A Song of Ascents. Of David. Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

Hebrews 13:1 Let brotherly love continue.



We are sheep, and sheep are flock animals. One sheep becomes highly agitated if it is separated from the flock. It is the banding together in large groups that keeps sheep from predators that come after those who have strayed. But a flock of sheep needs a shepherd, for when one sheep moves the rest will follow, even if it's not headed in a very wise direction. I think you get the idea of why we need our Good Shepherd and why we need to stay together in “unity.” Thayer’s Greek Lexicon defines “**oneness**” as being “**united**” in will and spirit.

Yeshua desired that we as individual members of His Body of disciples would be “**unified and united**” together with Him and the Father. His prayer for “**unity**” was passionate. Notice that this “**oneness**” becomes an awesome tool for the world to come to belief in Him:

John 17:20 " I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹ "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me." ²² "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one:" ²³ "I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

In **Psalm 86**, David prays that the Father would “**teach him His ways**” so that he would obediently “**walk in Torah,**” fully “**united**” with Him:

Psalm 86:11 Teach me Your way, **וְיָהוָה**; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your Name.

In the Almighty’s plan of restoration, He speaks of the “**one heart**” He will give His children:

Jeremiah 32:39 'then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them.

We have chosen a lifestyle where we are obligated to turn our back on “**sin**” (sin is defined as Torahlessness). And so, we become “**one**” with Yeshua through our “**death to sin**” and through our “**walking in newness of life.**” We are not only “**united**” with Him, but we are to be “**united together**”:

Romans 6:1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? ² Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? ³ Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Messiah Yeshua were baptized into His death? ⁴ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Messiah was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness* of His resurrection,

⁶ knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ⁷ For he who has died has been freed from sin.

Sha'ul's discussion on “**unity**” in the book of **Ephesians** calls on the congregation at Ephesus to walk out their faith in “**unity**” as they walk out their individual callings:

Ephesians 4:1 I, therefore, the prisoner of Adonai, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ² with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³ endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Adonai, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one Elohim and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.

Our Father and Creator of us all, provided the Body of Messiah with everything it needs to be self-sustaining and perpetually united and unified. He did this all for His purpose and glory:

1 Corinthians 12:18 But now Yah has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

Perhaps you think we really got off track from the Torah portion. Not really. The elementary teachings that the priests gave the people concerning clean and unclean foods were necessary to teach the people how to become obedient in even the most basic actions in their lives. As they followed His instructions, they would become a “**unified, set-apart people**,” shining His light.

Matthew 5:16 “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

And following Him in the small things leads to wonderful benefits for the “**kingdom of Elohim**”:

Romans 14:17 for the kingdom of Elohim is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Today, faithful members of the “**kingdom of Elohim**” should be experiencing “**righteousness, peace, and joy**.” But I would suggest, those things won't fully come without “**unity**”:

Ephesians 2:14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one... so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace

This “**one new man**” keeps the “**commandments of יהוה**” and has the “**testimony of Yeshua!**”

Revelation 14:12 Here is the patience of the saints; here *are* those who keep the commandments of Yah and the faith of Yeshua.

Shabbat Shalom!

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