

## Playing With Fire – Shmini

### [Shiurim Main Menu](#)

וַיִּקְחוּ בְנֵי אַהֲרֹן נָדָב וַאֲבִיהוּא אִישׁ מִחֲתָתוֹ וַיִּתְּנוּ בָהֶן אֵשׁ וַיִּשְׂימוּ עָלֶיהָ קִטְרֹת  
וַיִּקְרִיבוּ לִפְנֵי ה' אֵשׁ זָרָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוָּה אֲתֶם. וַתִּצָּא אֵשׁ מִלִּפְנֵי ה' וַתֹּאכַל אוֹתָם וַיָּמָתוּ  
לִפְנֵי ה'. (ויקרא י, א-ב)

In parshat Shmini we read about the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon, on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan, the day of the inauguration of the Mishkan – a day that epitomized the climax of celebration and redemption of Am Yisrael.

Just one passuk before, we read about a *different* kind of fire וַתִּצָּא אֵשׁ מִלִּפְנֵי ה' וַתֹּאכַל עַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֶת הָעֹלָה וְאֶת הַחֲלָבִים וַיֵּרָא כָּל הָעָם וַיִּרְאוּ וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל פְּנֵיהֶם (ויקרא ט, כד). HKB"H's fire descended onto the mizbeach and consumed the korbanot. This was not fire made by man - it was unmistakably supernatural, Heavenly fire, a clear, visible sign that HKB"H's Shechina rested amongst Am Yisrael in the Mishkan. This caused Am Yisrael to rejoice and to fall on their faces in awe, what is known as גָּלוּ בְרַעְדָה.

Immediately after that we have two additional psukim that speak about fire – Nadav and Avihu bringing an זָרָה אֵשׁ, which resulted in a second Heavenly fire that descended and consumed them, causing their deaths.

The stark contrast between "fire of celebration" and "fire of retribution" in such a short time period is jarring and difficult to reconcile. According to the Midrash (ספרא) Nadav and Avihu sinned much early, at Har Sinai, but HKB"H did not take retribution on them at that time, because He did not want to ruin the rejoicing of Matan Torah. If so, why did HKB"H take their lives on the day of the inauguration of the Mishkan and ruin the celebrations of *that* great day? Could it not have waited until after the celebration?

According to the Or HaChaim (ibid.) Nadav and Avihu *knew* that their actions would result in death, but so great was their desire to be closer to the Shechina through the act of bringing the Ketoret, that they were willing to die for it. HaRav Baruch Rosenblum שליט"א says that it is like someone who is willing to risk their life to climb Mt. Everest, just to experience the sublime feeling of reaching the peak and being closer to Heaven than another other point on earth. In a similar vein he says that in the sin of Korach, all the followers of Korach knew that they were going to die if they brought the Ketoret, but they went ahead with it anyway, because it was something they felt was worth dying for. Same with all the Kohanim Gedolim in the time of Bayit Sheini who bribed and paid to be Kohen Gadol. They knew when they entered the Kodesh HaKodashim on

Yom Kippur they would die, but they considered it worth the cost. This is why there was such a turnover of Kohanim Gedolim in the period of Bayit Sheini.

In a previous shiur ([Shmini 2025](#)) we discussed the sin of Nadav and Avihu in more detail, and we will not repeat that here. Instead, I would like to explore a topic related to the above, but which is also connected to current events and raises a major issue that Am Yisrael, in this generation and these times need to address.

The question is "Is it possible to experience the presence of the Shechina today, even though we don't have the Beit HaMikdash?"

To illustrate, I would like to bring a mashal from the movie "Avatar". For those who have not seen this great (3D) movie, it is a fictional, futuristic story about pioneers from a dying planet earth who try to save humankind from extinction by attempting to colonize another planet with its own indigenous population, culture and religious beliefs. This native population is connected to their wellspring of existence through the "Home Tree", a special, magical tree that connects past, present and future and is the source of all life for these people. In the movie, some evil humans destroy the "Home Tree", thus scattering the native population and managing to take control of the planet. Without the umbilical cord of their "Home Tree" to connect them, the planet's society collapsed.

For Am Yisrael, our "Home Tree" (lehavdil) is the Beit HaMikdash. One might think that since our "Home Tree" has been destroyed, it is no longer possible to experience the Shechina. Am Yisrael at the inauguration of the Mishkan, above, experienced the presence of the Shechina with their own eyes. They saw the fire descending from Heaven onto the mizbeach.

The Mishna (אבות ג, ו) says that even though we no longer have the Beit HaMikdash, it is *still possible* to experience the Shechina. If ten people are עוסקים בתורה, the presence of the Shechina is שְׂרוּיָה בְּיַנְיָהּ – the premise of a minyan. However, it is not only if there are ten or more. If there are 5, 3, 2, even *one* person who is עוסק בתורה, the Shechina can be present. The Mishna brings various psukkim to prove each number.

Each and every one of us have experienced the Shechina at least once during our lives (probably many more) and I can prove it.

Anyone who has been present in shul when the Kohanim go up to duchen – every day in Israel and on chagim in the Diaspora – knows not to look directly at the Kohanim while they are reciting the priestly blessing. Why? Because the Shechina is present in the spaces between their fingers and we are not allowed to gaze directly at the Shechina. The יְרֵאת שְׂמַיִם we have is equivalent to Am Yisrael falling on their faces and rejoicing in our passuk above (hint: – we need to

*rejoice* when we listen to בְּרִכַּת לְהַגִּיב, at least have a smile on our face throughout – and certainly to *not* chat with the person sitting next to us in shul during the blessing).

However, it is not limited to being in shul, with a minyan, where the Mishna specifically tells us that the Shechina rests. *All* of us have experienced the Shechina on a personal, individual level at some point in our lives, be it a period of crisis, joy, epiphany, challenge, etc. I personally experienced it multiple times during the writing of sefer Meir Panim, the undeniable siyata di'Shmaya guiding my eye and my pen to discover and record things that could never possibly have emanated from my own limited intellect. When I reread the sefer (I try to read it often, to keep the details clear and vivid in my memory – R' Eliezer ben Horkenos had to repeat things 100 times before it sank in, this Eliezer needs many *more* than 100 times), when I get to certain sections, I cannot believe that it was my hand that actually wrote those words. Sometimes, I cry tears of joy when I read them. That is experiencing the Shechina.

This is what David HaMelech meant when he said אַחַת שְׂאֵלְתִי מֵאֵת ה' אוֹתָהּ אֶבְקֶשׁ שְׁבִתִי בְּבֵית ה' כָּל יְמֵי חַיֵּי לַחַזוֹת בְּנֶעֱמ ה' וּלְבַקֵּר בְּהִיכָלוֹ (תהילים כז, ד). The ה' נֶעֱמ he is referring to is the Shechina. Once someone has experienced the נֶעֱמ, the Shechina, all other pleasures in the world pale in comparison. David HaMelech personally experienced the Shechina, which enveloped him 24/7.

Even *without* the Beit HaMikdash we can experience the Shechina! So, why then do we need the Beit HaMikdash at all? Why was it insufficient for HKB"H to leave the world with the reality of the Avot, individual families, whose reality and everyday existence were de facto like having a Mikdash! The Ramban, in his introduction to sefer Shmot, says that the tents of the Avot were de facto a Beit Mikdash – the Menorah, perpetually lit, the blessing in the bread (Shulchan) and the Shechina in a cloud on the tent. Why is having a "personal", private Beit Mikdash insufficient? The passuk says וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכָם (שמות כה, ח) – the ultimate purpose of the Beit Mikdash is to create a Mikdash within *ourselves* anyway!

However, that was not HKB"H's plan. It is not enough that each person has a private Mikdash within them and experiences the Shechina on a personal level, HKB"H also wanted us to have "*national* Beit Mikdash", in addition to the personal version. This is why He commanded us to build the Mishkan in the Midbar, which then entered Eretz Yisrael with Yehoshua.

This is where David HaMelech learned it from, that a situation where a national Mikdash does not exist – is unacceptable. Mishkan Shilo had been destroyed and the Aron HaBrit was "wandering" from place to place and was not permanently resting where it should. David, who was already king and had defeated his enemies, said "This is totally unacceptable! It cannot be that I am living in a בֵּית אֶרְזִים while the Aron HaBrit is in storage" (שמואל ב, ז, ב). That



generation that is hard to find. Some are completely *unattuned*, not to building the private nor the national Mikdash.

Without generalizing, the Charedi sector (with the exception of Chabad and Brisk) is predominantly focused on building the private Mikdash and is purposely *unfocused* on building the national Mikdash, which they believe will descend ready made from Heaven. They are often, sometimes violently, *against* any attempts to our building it (despite the psak of the Rambam), or even devoting time to *studying* it. With the exception of one or two, the vast majority of Charedi yeshivas focus on studying the "seven masechtot" of halacha intensively, while the entire seder Kodshim is purposely neglected.

Perhaps the most interesting and perplexing phenomenon that prevails today (also without generalizing) is that the National Religious sector, who ideologically *do* believe in settling and rebuilding Eretz Yisrael and fulfilling the psak of the Rambam to build the national Mikdash - while they verbally express support for it, they sadly take little *active* part in it. In the microcosm of our activities in Machon Lechem HaPanim (which is a mirror to the larger picture), we have found that the Dati Leumi sector is almost totally *uninterested* in taking any active part in building the national Beit HaMikdash. While they do not voice opposition to it like the Charedi sector does, their support is mostly lip service and nothing more. The largest demographic that attends our Lechem HaPanim workshops is Chabad. We have repeatedly found that spending equal amounts on advertising our activities to the Dati Leumi sector and to the Chabad sector results in an overwhelming majority of participants to our workshops from the Chabad sector.

This is a very surprising reality, given that the "motto" of the Dati Leumi sector (to which I belong) is תּוֹרָה וְעִבוּדָה, which essentially means studying Torah and building and *servicing* in the Beit HaMikdash! However, the עִבוּדָה part has been "transformed" into something else - being participant in the economy of the country (studying/working for a parnasa, serving in the army, etc. – all of which are no less important, but also no *more* important than building the national Mikdash). I attribute this phenomenon to the bourgeois mindset that has mostly overtaken the Dati Leumi sector, in which building the national Mikdash does not really fit in with the busy schedule of other "more important" things. In this, the Dati Leumi sector has become identical to the Charedi sector, who regard the Beit HaMikdash very low priority, compared to the other "more important" issues.

I will not even speak about the secular sector, for whom the national Mikdash is a total *non-entity* and is as foreign to them as aliens from the planet in the movie Avatar. This was the opinion of an Ha'aretz reporter who came to write an article on our workshops.

After Chabad, I am sad to say, the largest population group who are interested in building the national Beit HaMikdash are – Evangelical Christians! This is an enormous קְטָרוּג on Am Yisrael, Rachmana litzlan, that the goyim are more interested in our destiny than we are.

There is, I am glad to say, a small, but growing group of the younger generation, many from the לְעֵר הַגְּבָעוֹת, who have been captivated with the concept of rebuilding the national Mikdash. They frequently engage in activism, trying to change the status quo on Har HaBayit, trying to offer korbanot, like recently trying to bring a Korban Pesach on Har HaBayit, etc. Last Shavuot they tried to offer the Shte HaLechem on Har HaBayit, in an intricate mission that could put many Hollywood movies to shame. They smuggled in the two large loaves in a baby stroller, underneath the baby! Unfortunately, while this group are highly focused on building the national Mikdash, they are less focused on the private Mikdash, paying *less attention to halacha* than to evading the secret service. Last year I voiced frustration with the way they conducted the mission which resulted in the Shte HaLechem on Har HaBayit being pigul – unfit for the korban (see shiur on [Naso 2025](#)).

I participated in a Mikdash conference last year in Jerusalem and heard HaRav Yisrael Ariel שליט"א from Machon HaMikdash address this issue, voicing the opinion that, even though these activists didn't pay enough attention to halacha – they compensated for it with their passion to rebuild the national Mikdash, while the rest of the bourgeois establishment prefer to pay lip service, rather than doing anything *real* to further the vision of the national Mikdash.

I think the truth is somewhere in the middle. To rebuild the national Mikdash we need a *balance* of passion and halacha. We need to have a pure, innocent, תְּמִים yearning to build our national Mikdash and the courage to act on this passion. This needs to be coupled at the same time with adherence to halacha. In the equation of whom we need to fear most, the Shabak or HKB"H, the answer is undoubtedly HKB"H. If the toss-up is between avoiding being phone-tapped or having a kosher korban, the kosher korban takes preference. Hopefully the lessons have been learned and this year's attempt will be with a kosher set of Shte HaLechem.

This is what our parsha teaches us. The unbridled passion of Nadav and Avihu that was not tempered by halacha – led to disaster. This is the foundation principle of the Beit Hamikdash and if an infringement of this principle takes place, *even* on the day of its inauguration, intended as a celebration, retribution cannot be postponed.

In this matter, it is incumbent on leaders and scholars like HaRav Yisrael Ariel שליט"א from Machon HaMikdash and other authorities in the field, like myself to make a more concerted effort to be mekarev these activist groups and

to give them halachic guidance, so that their activities are not counterproductive, but rather highly focused to לעוֹרֵר רְחֻמֵי שְׂמַיִם.

Similarly, the task of reconnecting the Dati Leumi sector to the mission of building the national Mikdash is something we need to invest more resources and energy on. This sector is a *niche audience* for this mission, they just need to be woken up and shown how *important* the national Mikdash mission is to our future, certainly no less than serving in the army or settling in Eretz Yisrael, learning Torah and working for a parnasa – perhaps *even more so!*

It sounds good in theory, in practice however, it is a little more complex.

It all starts with תְּמִימוּת, a sincere, innocent, burning desire to restore HKB"H's Shechina to Am Yisrael not only on a private level, but also on a national level. Unfettered by agendas - personal, or political.

It cannot however come about only with תְּמִימוּת, it also needs maximum hishtadlut. The resources needed to reach the target audiences to establish a mass grassroots movement are enormous. It needs the backing of established organizations with a common vision. It needs funding from philanthropists who support that vision.

As we speak, we can see the destructive power of sheer money. How Qatar, with its almost unlimited financial resources have succeeded in infiltrating and controlling most of the Western world. What the antisemites accused the Jews of doing in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a worldwide conspiracy to control the world – has *de facto been implemented* in the opposite direction by the enemies of the Jews, Qatar and the Moslem Brotherhood. They have succeeded in perpetuating lies and rewriting history – just using money!

Imagine what we could achieve in the opposite direction if we recruited our entire nation and those of influence in the world who support us, to reverse this evil and reestablish the truth. To strip away all the lies and fallacies these evil people have been encasing reality with and rediscovering our core and our destiny.

This is a call to arms! I urge you to forward this shiur to as many people as you can. If you know of people of influence who are interested in helping Am Yisrael fulfil its destiny as a nation thereby restoring the world to peace and prosperity, I implore you to try recruit them to this cause.

There is an army of people out there, of which I am a proud member, each dedicating their lives to a specific aspect of the national Mikdash. All together, we have the know-how to build it.

We are lacking only one thing – a burning desire in the majority of Am Yisrael to build the Mikdash. When we have a grassroots movement of the majority of Am Yisrael who urgently want the Mikdash to be built, then it will be rebuilt. To establish this grassroots movement requires vast financial and organizational resources to reconnect our people with their authentic roots. Until our nation achieves parity and internal peace, this vision cannot be realized. This is why David HaMelech could not build the Beit HaMikdash, he had to wait for his son Shlomo, in whose time internal peace reigned in Am Yisrael.

This movement has to be spearheaded by leaders with vision and vast knowledge of halacha relating to the Beit HaMikdash. It needs to give our hungry youth a roadmap, to harness their passion and to focus it with halacha, so that we don't have a recurrence of the Nadav and Avihu syndrome.

When HKB"H sees that we are doing our maximum hishtadlut, He will מְשַׁלֵּם. We cannot expect HKB"H to send the 3<sup>rd</sup> Beit HaMikdash down from Heaven, without us lifting a finger and doing our own maximum hishtadlut. This is the way HKB"H and the world works. Heavenly abundance cannot appear when the table is empty. To rain blessing down to the world there has to be Lechem HaPanim on the Shulchan.

Am Yisrael are changing conceptions. Instead of going around in endless circles defending from and weakening the proxies, we have finally decided to deal with the *head of the snake*, on the premise, that if the head of the evil snake falls, its proxies will wither and die.

The same applies to building the national Mikdash. We have been furiously running around in endless circles dealing with the *symptoms* of the absence of a national Beit HaMikdash, assimilation, antisemitism, internal strife etc. We should instead be targeting the "head" issue. If we succeed in rebuilding the national Mikdash, all the "proxy symptoms" will evaporate. Just like we have decided to go all out to root out evil from the world, we need to stop fooling around with half measures and *go full out* to replace evil with the *absolute good*. If we win this battle with Amalek, but do not continue the mission by fulfilling our destiny as a nation, then it will all have been for nought. We will revert to the infighting that has plagued our nation for millenia.

Both are flip sides of the same coin. You have שְׂאֵגַת הָאָרִי on one side, eliminating the evil. On the flip side you have בְּנֵי אֶרֶץ אֱלֹהִים, establishing the absolute good by building the national Mikdash. בְּבִיאָה.

Shabbat Shalom

Eliezer Meir Saidel

Machon Lechem Hapanim

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