

Torah Weekly

ת"סב

A Silence That's More Than Words

PARSHAT SHEMINI

5-11 April 2026
18-24 Nissan

Torah Reading:
Shemini: Leviticus 9:1 - 11:47
Samuel II 6:1-19

Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzah for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

The long-awaited day had arrived. Elisheva beamed. She'd eagerly anticipated this auspicious moment. Her pious husband and each of her sons were about to reach a pivotal milestone. Just imagine the excitement she felt watching them approach the holy Tabernacle. The sanctity was palpable. With profound gratitude and pride, she observed their every step.¹

Her husband, Aaron the High Priest, entered, along with his sons. But shortly afterwards, the unfathomable occurred. The oldest sons, Nadav and Avihu, were struck and killed by a heavenly fire.

Commentators propose various reasons as to why this calamity took place. Rather than consider the why, let's focus on some lessons that can be learned from Aaron's ineffable response to this tragedy.

Moses said to Aaron: "This is what the L-rd spoke, [when He said], 'I will be sanctified through those near to Me, and before all the people I will be glorified.'"²

Aaron's reaction to these words was: "Vayidom Aaron"—he was silent. To most of us, such silence is unimaginable. How does a parent remain silent upon watching the untimely demise of a child—let alone two children?

Perhaps such silence is far more powerful and expressive than words. To remain silent and accept inexplicable loss requires inner fortitude fueled by emunah. Emunah is an inner certainty that goes beyond its usual translation as faith or belief; it is expressed by acting upon what you know is so.

Aaron didn't complain, "G-d, why have you punished us like this?" He didn't blame G-d; he accepted. This is emunah in action.

The Torah is replete with stories of pain. Righteous individuals, such as our patriarchs and matriarchs, were

not exempt from suffering. Any bereaved parent knows this terrible pain. It may subside, but it's always there. We cannot understand why certain things happen, but we can accept that this is so. Self-recrimination and senseless regret only compound the inevitable pain. And only G-d truly knows why.

The Hebrew word emunah is usually translated as faith or belief, but it actually expresses so much more. Emunah means faithfulness and allegiance to what you know. More than just a theoretical concept or idea, it is an action or practice. Emunah enriches your resilience in the midst of great struggle, crisis or personal loss.

Another word related to emunah is the Hebrew word for training—imun. Faithfulness is the product of training. The Israeli Defense Force's term for military training is imunim—a derivative of emunah.

Emunah isn't limited to the belief in your mind. It is acted upon, connecting mind and body with actions. Emunah can be likened to a staircase. Intellectually, you may know that the stairs go up to the next level, but until you climb them, you won't actually experience that next level. Believing, or even knowing, that the stairs are there is not enough. You have to climb them.

We've all heard the adage "practice makes perfect." Professional athletes and musicians are the product of continual hours of intensive training and practice. Such training becomes ingrained, and visible when called to action. It's the same with emunah.

We have an inherent desire to understand and, thus, seek explanation. Fight the urge to find someone or something to blame. Some things are beyond our understanding and seem inexplicable. Instead, go outside and look up at the sky. The sky is above and beyond you. The "why" is as well! Emunah is expansive and endless. Gazing up at the sky can teach us this lesson. It's always there, hovering above us; likewise can be our emunah.

Silence is often the loudest and best response. It doesn't mean that you won't cry or bemoan your pain and loss. But a guilt trip won't help you or anyone else. It's senseless.

When the tribulations of life have stretched your limits to the max, you can feel that you have no more to give. But there's still so much more expected of you. You may think to yourself: "Will things ever let up? How much more can I take?" You wonder why this is happening. At times like these, you need to call upon your reserve of emunah.

Each of us needs to establish and maintain a personal emunah account and make regular deposits into it. Emunah is a spiritual insurance policy, ensuring that you'll have the means to carry on. As a beacon that illuminates new pathways in the midst of crisis, it must be perpetually charged

Making It Relevant

Think of circumstances you've experienced in which strong emunah enriched your coping skills.

Strive to learn from every struggle and uncover a lesson from each. Click here for a fuller understanding of emunah.

Sacred material – do not desecrate
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No One Alone,
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Schedule time each week to check the “balance” and make a small deposit in your personal emunah account.

By Katia Bolotin

Shemini in a Nutshell

Leviticus 9:1–11:47

The name of the Parshah, “Shemini,” means “eighth” and it is found in Leviticus 9:1.

On the eighth day, following the seven days of their inauguration, Aaron and his sons begin to officiate as kohanim (priests); a fire issues forth from G-d to consume the offerings on the altar, and the divine presence comes to dwell in the Sanctuary.

Aaron’s two elder sons, Nadav and Avihu, offer a “strange fire before G-d, which He commanded them not” and die before G-d. Aaron is silent in face of his tragedy. Moses and Aaron subsequently disagree as to a point of law regarding the offerings, but Moses concedes to Aaron that Aaron is in the right.

G-d commands the kosher laws, identifying the animal species permissible and forbidden for consumption. Land animals may be eaten only if they have split hooves and also chew their cud; fish must have fins and scales; a list of non-kosher birds is given, and a list of kosher insects (four types of locusts).

Also in Shemini are some of the laws of ritual purity, including the purifying power of the mikvah (a pool of water meeting specified qualifications) and the wellspring. Thus the people of Israel are enjoined to “differentiate between the impure and the pure.”

Shemini Haftorah in a Nutshell

This week's haftorah mentions how Uzzah was struck dead when he disrespectfully touched the Ark of the Covenant; reminiscent of Nadab and Abihu's death described in this week's Torah reading.

The Holy Ark had been in storage in the house of Avinadav for many years, ever since the destruction of the Tabernacle in Shiloh. Recently crowned King David decided to move the Ark to the new capital, Jerusalem. He had the Ark placed on a cart and it was transported amidst singing and dancing. When the procession reached Goren Nachon, the oxen misstepped and Uzzah, Avinadav's son, took hold of the Ark to steady it—whereupon he was instantly killed.¹ David was devastated, and he temporarily placed the Ark in the home of Oved-edom the Edomite, where it remained for three months.

"And it was told to King David saying: 'G-d has blessed the house of Oved-edom, and all that belongs to him, because of the Ark of G-d.' And David went and brought up the ark of G-d from the house of Oved-edom into the City of David with joy." The Ark was brought up to the city of David with great singing and dancing. David then blessed and distributed presents to all the assembled Israelites.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Pharaoh Becomes Aware of Escape (1313 BCE)

Following the Jewish nation's grand exodus from Egypt (see Jewish history for the 15th of Nissan), Pharaoh, who only gave official permission for the Jews to leave for three days, was informed by secret agents whom he sent together with the Jews that they had no intention of returning.

Pharaoh decided to mobilize his army and pursue the Jews, with the intention of bringing them back to Egypt. This led to the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea (see Jewish history for the 21st of Nissan).

R. Levi Yitzchak Schneerson born (1878)

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson (1878-1944), was born on the 18th of Nissan in the town of Podrovnah (near Gomel) to his parents, Rabbi Baruch Schneur and Rebbetzin Zelda Rachel Schneerson; his great-great grandfather was the 3rd Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch.

In 1900 Rabbi Levi Yitzchak married Rebbetzin Chanah Yanovski, whose father, Rabbi Meir Shlomo, was the rabbi of the Russian city of Nikolaiyev. In 1902, their eldest son, Menachem Mendel, later to be known as The Lubavitcher Rebbe, was born. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak lived in Nikolaiyev until 1909, when he was appointed to serve as the Rabbi of Yekaterinoslav (today, Dnepropetrovsk). In 1939 he was arrested by the communist regime for his fearless stance against the Party's efforts to eradicate Jewish learning and practice in the Soviet Union. After more than a year of torture and interrogations in Stalin's notorious prisons, he was sentenced to exile to the interior of Russia, where he died in 1944.

Purim Fossano (1796)

On this day in 1796, the Jewish community of Fossano, Italy was miraculously saved from the hands of a murderous mob by a French bomb which landed just in time to scare away the attackers. This day was established as "Purim Fossano" in commemoration of the miraculous salvation.

Pharaoh Corners Jews (1313 BCE)

Pharaoh's pursuit of the Jews ended on this day, the 18th of Nissan on the shores of the Red Sea.

A terrified Jewish nation divides into several factions. Some advocated mass suicide, others wanted to surrender and return to Egypt, the bolder ones prepared to battle the Egyptians, while others advised the nation to pray.

G-d thought otherwise. He instructed the Jews to simply proceed onwards -- despite the sea which stood in their path.

The Jews complied, and the entire following night they went through the parted waters of the Red Sea