**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA**

**PARASHAT SHEMINI**

**SICHA OF HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN**

**The Routine and the Extraordinary**

Summarized by Matan Glidai

Translated by David Silverberg

 "It was on the eighth day…" Rashi and Ibn Ezra debate which day this verse speaks of. According to Rashi, "the eighth day" refers to Rosh Chodesh Nissan. During the seven previous days, the Mishkan had been assembled and dismantled daily, and only on this eighth day did Moshe erect the Mishkan permanently. Ibn Ezra, however, contends that the verse speaks of the eighth of Nissan. Either way, however, this day was clearly one of jubilant celebration. The Gemara (Gittin 60a) adds that eight "parshiyot" of the Torah were taught that day, and it also comments (Shabbat 87b) that this day received ten "crowns," i.e., it boasted ten distinctions: the first day of creation (Sunday), the inauguration of kehuna (priesthood), service in the Mikdash, consumption of sacrificial meat, etc. The pivotal moment of this momentous day occurred when the Shekhina descended for the first time, in the form of a heavenly fire. Indeed, this day revolved around the extraordinary; it was a day of firsts, the opening of a new chapter in the history of Am Yisrael.

 On the other hand, however, we may speak as well of precisely the opposite character of this day. The eighth day marked the beginning of the routine "avoda" - ritualistic service - in the Mikdash, the day-to-day ritual, replete with dry, rigid halakhot and inherently bereft of any festive or extraordinary quality. This characteristic becomes particularly evident according to Rashi's position. For seven days the Mishkan had been assembled and then taken apart again. Throughout that week, the Mishkan served as a temporary structure and the service performed assumed the quality of a singular, one-time series of events. But on this eighth and final day, the Mishkan was erected once and for all for permanent use and entered the phase of routine and standard procedure.

 Even according to Ibn Ezra, who believed that the Mishkan had already stood permanently throughout the previous week, there can be no doubt that a sense of jubilant novelty pervaded this seven-day period. One expression of this extraordinary quality is Moshe's having served the role of kohen. Aharon and his sons assumed their position as kohanim only from the eighth day onward. The Gemara (Avoda Zara 34a) remarks that throughout the seven-day period Moshe wore the special "bigdei lavan," the priestly garments worn specifically on Yom Kippur, rather than the standard garb of the kohanim. Rashi (s.v. Moshe) explains that since Moshe was not a kohen, and his serving this role was merely a temporary measure enacted by the Almighty, he was considered like any non-kohen, who may not wear the priestly garments. Tosafot explain differently, claiming that the priestly garments had yet to be officially inaugurated and sanctified, and thus despite Moshe's status as full-fledged kohen during this week, he could not wear the standard priestly uniform. But even Tosafot would concede that Moshe's serving as kohen constituted an aberration from the norm, and the routine procedures of the Mishkan service began only on the eighth day.

 The fact that a prophet, rather than a kohen, officiated over the service in the Mishkan throughout the period of the "milu'im" is of great significance. Prophecy symbolizes novelty, that which lies beyond the ordinary. The beholding of prophecy is an extraordinary, exalted event, full of vitality and spiritual power. The goal of the prophet is to induce change. Priesthood, by contrast, involves a routine, day-in and day-out service. The kohanim carry out the same responsibilities each day and must ensure strict adherence to a myriad of dry and detailed laws. Their service is marked by scrupulous observance and loyalty to the system. In fact, the Gemara in Masekhet Yoma speaks at length about the oath forced upon the high priest that he would not deviate from the regulations of the Yom Kippur service. Additionally, priesthood is transmitted through inheritance from father to son, while prophecy can be achieved only through personal effort and initiative. Part of the routine of priesthood is its passage from one generation to the next, thus affording it a quality of succession and consistency. Each prophecy, however, differs from the other, and each is stamped with the prophet's own unique individuality.

 This situation of rigorous routine in the Mikdash creates a problem of sorts. Drowned by the detail and dry rules, the kohanim could potentially lose their vitality and sense of newness as they perform their service. One may never allow his service of the Almighty to become stale, routine procedure; one may not relate to his observance as only a day-to-day, mechanical mode of conduct. Both the service in the Mikdash and the service to God of each and every Jew must include both components - priesthood and prophecy. On the one hand, one must meticulously adhere to every letter of the law and not deviate even slightly from any detail of the Halakha. His life must be filled with rituals and deeds which constantly reflect a scrupulous halakhic awareness. At the same time, one must serve the Almighty with life and vitality, always searching for ways to progress further, to arrive at something new.

 Moshe's officiating during the seven days of the "milu'im" was necessary to impart the prophetic spirit of newness to the service in the Mikdash. This idea may also underlie the view that Moshe in fact officiated in the Mishkan throughout the forty years in the wilderness (Zevachim 101b). As we know, throughout the Bible, the priests and prophets engaged in varying sorts of struggles and conflicts. The prophets called for greater infusion of spiritual content into the sacrifice rituals, noting that the Almighty does not need the sacrifices themselves, but rather what they represent. The priests, on the other hand, stood watch over the meticulousness of divine service.

 This idea is critical for each of us. As dwellers in the beit midrash, our lives are marked by routine and day-to-day work. Nevertheless, surrounded as we are by a general atmosphere of spiritual striving, we can and we must try to seize upon those precious moments of inspiration and infuse them into our daily lives, allow them to inform and inspire all our actions.

Once one leaves the confines of the yeshiva, this becomes harder. As I indicated before, it behooves each of us, both within yeshiva and without, to constantly search for novelty and vitality, while maintaining our unwavering commitment to every detail of the dry, technical halakhot. By infusing our halakhic observance with passion and spirituality, by building our connection to God through observing his mitzvot, we will truly be worthy successors of the prophets and priests.

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