

**Shemini**                      **Eighth**                      **Shabbat Parah**

**Torah:**                      Leviticus 9:1-11:47

**Haftarah:**                2 Samuel 6:1-7:17; Numbers 19:1-22; Ezekiel 39:16-38

**Brit Chadashah:**        Hebrews 7:1-19

Reading: Alan pp. 101,103 and Ps. 128. Jewish Hero: Nathan. Carrier: Isaac

This week's Torah Portion deals with three things. First it deals with the first sacrifices which we offered by Aaron and his sons in the newly dedicated tent of meeting. Next it deals with the strange fire which Aaron's sons unsuccessfully tried to offer in front of the Ark of the Covenant. It ends with the first description of Kosher animals which are safe to eat.

The book of Exodus ends with a description of the first setting up of the tent of meeting and the tabernacle and more details of this amazing event are given in the account in Leviticus. This is the first time the people are engaging directly with the L-rd through the newly established sacrificial system and the people must have been greatly excited because this was their first step in moving away from the mountain and moving towards their journey to the Promised Land.

They had watched all the elements of this process as they were put together and now the L-rd who had appeared to them on the mountain was going to take up permanent residence in their midst. After he had performed the rituals related to first set of ritual sacrifices, Aaron lifted up his arms and blessed the people and before he had a chance to light afire to burn them, the presence of the L-rd consumed the first set of offerings which were place before the tent of meeting.

Instead of taking fire from the altar which was now burning, two of Aaron's sons kindled some incense and tried to bring it before the L-rd, instead of lighting it from the fire which the L-rd had provided. The fire of the L-rd came through the veil and burned them alive for their insolence. Fire itself was not to be considered holy, only the fire which the had come from the L-rd was to be used in the service of the L-rd.

The Talmud speculates that they were burned, but that the fire did not affect their sacred garments, but that is not what the passage records. Their sacred garments did not protect them from the fire, but the clothing was not consumed by the fire and their cousins carried their bodies out of the holy place by their garments, without having to touch the dead bodies, which would have defiled them.

Aaron proceeded with the next set of sacrifices without taking time to mourn, but does not eat his portion of the expiation (atonement) offering which the ritual required. This one time deviation from the ritual is accepted and the daily ritual cycle was set up and lasted until it was disrupted by the destruction of the first temple.

Our walk with the L-rd needs to be our first priority, no matter what else is going on in our lives. The joy of the first appearance of the L-rd in the midst of the people was not allowed to be dimmed by the foolishness of Aaron's sons and the acknowledgement of their death was not allowed to become a permanent feature of the daily ritual. The only deviation which was allowed, meant that Aaron did not eat of the atonement offering, even though it was perfumed according to all the other stipulations.

Just before Moses outlines the purification rituals for those who had some kind of physical defilement, an extensive description is given of what kind of meat can be eaten, without defiling the one who eats it. There are many kinds of animals who can serve many kinds of purposes, but only a special category was set aside for the purpose of eating and of sacrificing. The L-rd is the Creator of all living things, but He designates a special category of animals which were safe to eat and which would not defile those who ate them.

All plants are kosher and the only time that leavening is forbidden is during the week of unleavened bread. So rather go into a detailed description of why certain animals are kosher and others are not, the L-rd divides them up into five categories and designates which animals in four of these categories which may be eaten. He forbids the consumption of any kind of carrion, where rotteness may have set in before the meat was taken to be eaten.

We can be infected if we eat animals which were not set aside for that purpose and if we eat dead animals we encounter, which we have not killed, whether they are considered kosher or not. The L-rd wanted to teach His people to avoid all kinds of defilement, so that none of diseases of Egypt or those of Canaan would be allowed to negatively impact the spiritual life of His people. Paganism of any kind is to be avoided, because His Word is the only kind of influence we are allowed to have as an influence in our lives.

**Sermon: Getting Ready for Pesach: Understanding the L-rd's Table**

**Passage: I Corinthians 11:20-34**