

The Pardes Center for Jewish Educators presents

An Interactive PARSHA EXPERIENCE



Parsha: Shemini

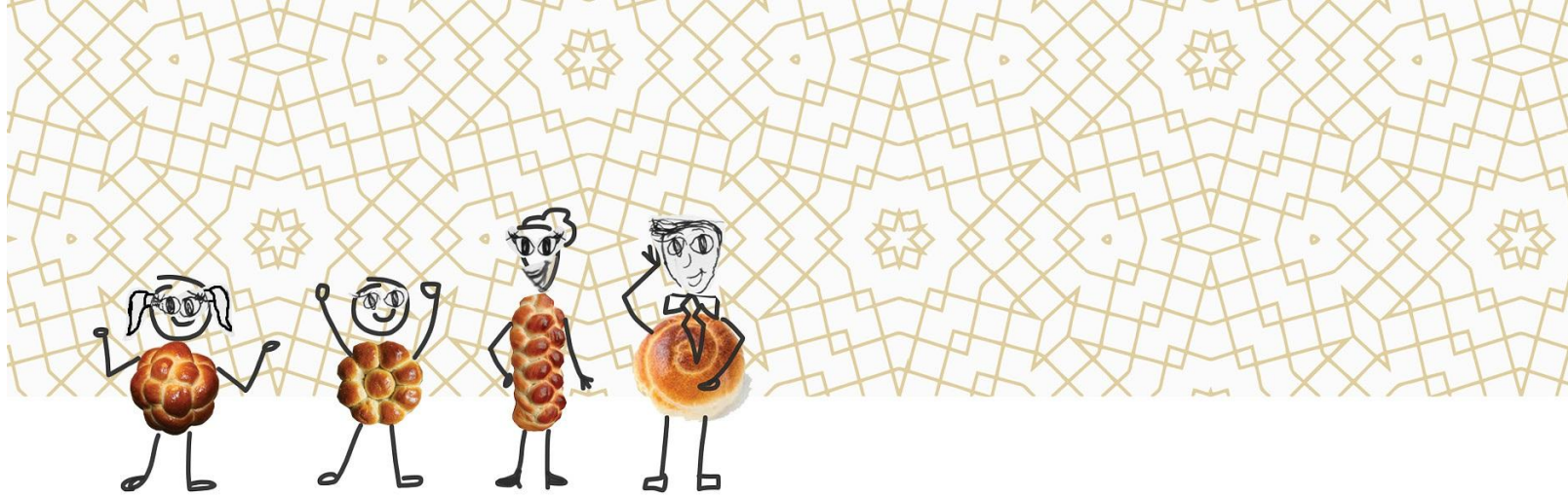
Title: Aharon's Silence

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The Parsha at First Glance

Spotlight on the Parsha:

Way back in the Book of *Shemot*, God instructed *Bnei Yisrael* to build the *Mishkan*. And indeed, they did a great job of obeying God's command! They contributed all sorts of items to build this special building that was going to be used as a religious center for the nation; a master architect was appointed; and



the walls, hangings, the ark, menorah, and other furnishings were crafted. The clothes for the *Kohanim* – the priests – were sewn, and they were taught about the special rituals and ceremonies they would be performing in the Mishkan. There were then seven special practice days where the Kohanim – Moshe’s brother Aharon and his four sons, Nadav, Avihu, Elazar, and Itamar – got ready for their very important work.

Our *parsha*, which is called *Parshat Shemini*, meaning “Eighth,” begins on the eighth day. This is the moment all of the Israelites have been waiting for! No more practice days. The Mishkan is about to open for real.

Zooming In:

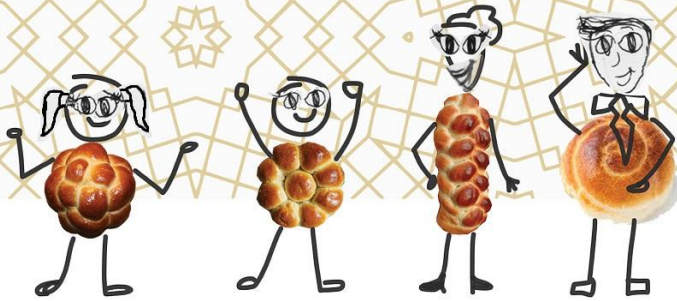
The Kohanim do their special opening day ceremonies, offering gifts to God on the altar. Aharon and Moshe bless the people, and they all feel that God is with them. But then something bad happens. Something really bad. Aharon’s two older sons, Nadav and Avihu, put something on the altar they aren’t supposed to put – some kind of “strange fire.” We can’t be sure if they made a mistake, or did it on purpose. But whichever it was, they offered something to God that God had not asked them to offer – and they got in big trouble for it. In fact, they died.

This was supposed to be the most special and happy day of the year for Bnei Yisrael, but it turned into the most terrible day! Moshe and Aharon were right there when Nadav and Avihu died.

Moshe’s immediate reaction was to say to Aharon:

2 “This is what God meant when He said:
‘Through those near to me I show Myself holy,
and gain glory before all the people.’”

ב...הוא אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר יְהוָה
לֵאמֹר בְּקִרְבִי אֶקְדֹּשׁ, וְעַל-פְּנֵי
כָּל-הָעָם, אֶכָּבֵד...



And Aharon's response to what Moshe said? “וַיֵּדָם אֶהָרֶן”.

The word וַיֵּדָם means that Aharon stood still and was silent. He didn't make a sound or make a move. He stood like a דומם, like an inanimate object. Like a rock.

The Parsha Through Another Lens

Becoming a Commentator:

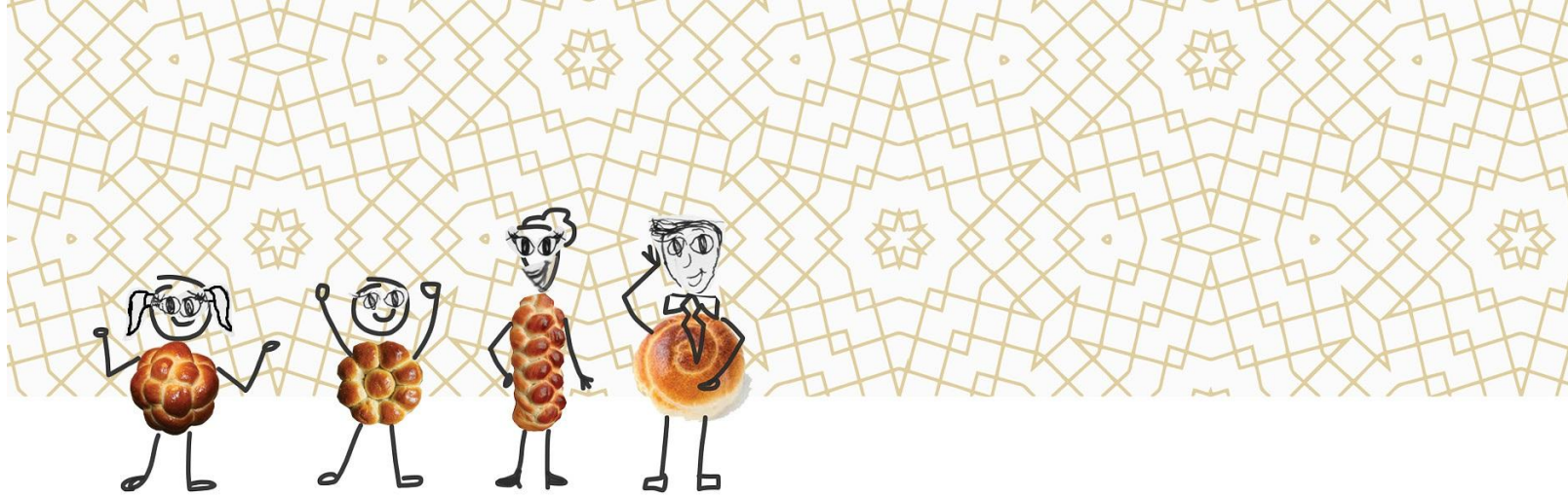
Commentators are people who write down what they think the Torah means.

One of the very famous rabbis who wrote a commentary on the Torah, the Rashbam, explained what he thought about this episode. He said that what he thought Moshe was actually saying to Aharon was the following:

“Do not mourn, and do not cry, and don't stop the work you are doing, because God told us that He wants to be shown to be holy by the Kohanim... [and in order to show that God is holy, they can't let their own feelings take precedence over their important work in the Mishkan, even if they are feeling very sad].”

The Rashbam then explained that he thought the words וַיֵּדָם אֶהָרֶן mean that Aharon did not mourn or cry, even for a short time. He just kept on doing his work, like Moshe told him to.

One of the wonderful things about learning Torah is that we all can do it. And we can all be commentators. So now it's your turn! Answer the Questions for



Consideration below from your own heart and mind. If you agree with the Rashbam, that's fine. If you disagree with the Rashbam, that's also fine. Share your thoughts with everyone else at the table.

Questions for Consideration:

- What do **you** think Aharon felt when he saw what happened to his sons?
- What do **you** think Moshe meant when he told Aharon that this is what God had meant when he had earlier told him, 'Through those near to me I show Myself holy, and gain glory before all the people'?
- Why do **you** think Aharon stood completely still and was silent? Why do you think he acted like a rock that doesn't move or breathe?
- If **you** were Moshe, what do you think you would say to Aharon? Would you comfort him or tell him he needed to stay strong?
- What do **you** think a person should do when someone they know has lost someone close to them? How should they react to them? What should they say to them? What should they do for them?

Shabbat Shalom!