

# Shemini

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Here is a minhag for *tzaddikim* to fast on *Rosh Chodesh Nissan*, even though we normally do not fast on a *Rosh Chodesh*. The reason for the exception? Because it was the day that Nadav and Avihu were struck down by God for bringing a “strange fire” on the eighth day of the inauguration ceremony. Just like that one of the happiest days in Jewish history became one of the saddest.

Their deaths alone were sufficient reason for national mourning. But what made it so much more upsetting was how close we were to achieving one of the greatest feats of mankind when it happened. It is one thing to put a man on the moon, but something more fantastic to build a structure that God would be willing to dwell within. Even the Second Temple didn't achieve that.

Must it always be that way? Must we always only come close to redemption and then prevent it through some mishap? Because although the Jewish people had already left Egypt and had already received the Torah at Mt. Sinai, having God dwell in a structure, the work of their own hands, the *Mishkan*, was a higher level of redemption. The deaths of two great people at its inauguration greatly marred that.

The answer is, *yes*, that is the way redemption works, as the *GR"A* explains:

In the beginning, *Mosbiach* will be revealed and after that, concealed, and the Jewish people will undergo birth pangs and great pains, as occurred during the first redemption. (*Biur HaGR"A, Tikunei Zohar, Tikun 22*)

For example, when Moshe *Rabbeinu* first came down to Egypt and spoke about redemption, the Jewish people could finally see an end to their slavery. But when Pharaoh not only ignored Moshe's demand for Jewish freedom but instead increased their slavery, the Jewish people lost all hope in going out. The next time Moshe came and spoke about impending redemption, they wouldn't even give him the time of day. They couldn't, being so broken.

Then there was the time that the Jewish people witnessed the incredible miracle of the splitting sea and the satisfying experience of seeing their enemy washed away by it. They even sang *Shirah* after it. But, by the end of the *parsha*, they found themselves defending the nation from a very humbling attack from Amalek.

And part of the confusion of the people in the *Purim* story emphasized in *Megillas Esther*, is how something good happens only to be followed by something bad. Mordechai saved the king's life and is recorded in the chronicles for having done so, and that is followed by Haman's rise to power.

In recent times we have the situation of *Eretz Yisroel*. Even people who did not believe that becoming an official nation in 1948 had much to do with *geulah* still waited to see how things would play out over time. Now they have joined so many others who are disappointed to see how bad the situation has become in *Eretz Yisroel* between the wars with neighbors and those within the country. Whatever steps forward we took toward redemption seemed to have been reversed through sin, wars, and politics.

*God forbid*. That is only the way it looks. The *GR"A* elsewhere says that the redemption process always goes forward, even when it looks like it is going backward. Being human, we like success to come pleasantly, or at least only with difficulties we can anticipate and plan for. Being God, success comes for us in whatever way He deems necessary for an individual or the nation.

Some of the reasons for the kind of difficulties we would rather avoid are *kabbalistic* and go back to before Creation, so *Sheviras HaKeilim*, the breaking of the vessels. But a more obvious reason is the importance of humility in any redemption process. Humility *is* redemption, because it frees us of the kind of ego that interferes with our ability to be who truly are, instead of who we think we need to be.

Would you pour drink into a dirty glass, especially if its residual taste would interfere with the one you want? Likewise, the light of God only flows "down" to people who are humble. The attack on the Jewish people on October 7 made different people feel different things. But the most important thing it made people feel was humility, and to the extent that it did, that is how much more ready we are for the redeeming light of God. May it finally end this exile and bring the final redemption we have been anticipating for millennia now, without further need for any of the humbling events we have experienced until now. Have an amazing *Shabbos*.

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