

## Parashah Shmini

The one that shows what happens at the Tabernacle (Mishkan in Hebrew) with Aaron's son's disobedience.

**This parashah is set at the Tabernacle**, which is the central place of worship for the Israelites. The story begins with the tragic incident of Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu. They offer unauthorized incense before the Tabernacle, in violation of the strict divine instructions regarding the proper procedures for the offerings. As a result of their disobedience and disregard for these divine instructions, a sudden and consuming fire emanates from the Tabernacle, and Nadab and Abihu are struck down and die on the spot.

Following this event, **the parashah goes into dietary laws and the distinction between clean and unclean animals**. It outlines the criteria for determining which animals are suitable for consumption, emphasizing the need for dietary purity among the Israelites. These laws are intended to promote not only physical health, but also spiritual well-being.

**The parashah concludes on a more positive note with the inauguration of Aaron and his remaining sons into the priesthood**. Through a series of specific rituals and offerings, they are consecrated as priests and made responsible for managing the spiritual connection between the Israelites and the divine. This event marks a pivotal moment in the Israelites' journey, solidifying the role of the priesthood in guiding the community and maintaining the sanctity of the Tabernacle.



Hello  
Haftarah

## Teen Takeaways from Parashah Shmini

- 1. The importance of being mindful of what you consume:** Parashah Shmini teaches us about dietary laws (kashrut). It's like a reminder to be mindful of what we eat. Think about the impact of your food choices on your health and the environment. Our ancestors believed that putting time and thought into considering what we eat helps us to understand the sacredness of taking care of our physical health. This is the opposite of "fast food." It helps us to think about eating and food beyond our basic needs. We develop a spiritual approach to life itself, and we evoke a sense of being grateful and thankful for the blessings that are all around us that we hardly notice.
- 2. Some biblical scholars think that the laws of kashrut were designed to keep the Israelites separate from their idolatrous neighbors.** After all, the Israelites believed that we are all children of one God, an idea that was challenged by those who worshipped a multitude of idols. If we do not eat with them, there is less chance for social interaction. That makes preservation of the ideals of the people easier to do. Today we do not regard our neighbors as pagan and find positive reasons to interact. Are there other reasons to "keep kosher" or diet in a particular manner?
- 3. Make responsible choices:** The story of Nadab and Abihu reminds us that even when you're excited or trying something new, it's important to make responsible choices. According to some interpreters, Nadab and Abihu disregarded their special responsibility and mocked its importance.
- 4. Respect for sacred spaces:** Parashah Shmini tells us about the Tabernacle (Mishkan in Hebrew), a special place of worship. It's a lesson in respecting sacred spaces, whether it's a temple, a church, a mosque, or even someone else's personal space. Treat places of worship and reverence with respect. Does it matter what we wear or how we behave when we are in those kind of places? What are we saying to our friends when we visit their sacred spaces? More importantly, when our friends come to our temple or synagogue, what do they think when they observe our behavior there? We want them to respect us and our Jewish identity, so don't we need to show them our self-respect?
- 5. Leaders set examples:** Aaron, as a high priest, shows us that leaders should set a good example. Whether you're a team captain, a club president, or just a big brother or sister, remember that others look up to you. Lead with integrity and kindness. Being a leader is not only about people who have been elected to important positions.
- 6. Find the holiness in everyday life:** Parashah Shmini reminds us that holiness isn't just in special places. It's in everyday actions. Try to find moments of meaning and goodness in your daily life, even in the ordinary stuff.
- 7. Sacrifice and giving:** Although we don't offer animal sacrifices today, the idea of giving something valuable to connect with something greater is still relevant. It's like the concept of giving your time or resources to help others or a cause you believe in. What feels better - getting a gift or giving one to someone else?
- 8. Be part of a community:** In Parashah Shmini, the community comes together for rituals. It's a reminder of the power of being part of a group. Whether it's your family, your friends, or a club, being part of a community can be enriching and fulfilling. Why is a minyan (at least 10 people) important for some Jewish rituals to take place? Do you like doing things all by yourself or with a group of like-minded people?
- 9. Keep growing:** Just like the Israelites needed to keep working on their spiritual growth, you can always strive to become a better person. Learning, growing, and improving are lifelong journeys.

## Summary

These lessons from Parashah Shmini aren't just for religious observance; they're also about **making positive choices, being a responsible leader, and finding meaning in your life.** They can help guide you on your life's journey!

