



Around the Shabbat Table

**Shabbat Shemini / Yom Hashoah 5762
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Introduction

This week, we read the *parasha* called Shemini, in the book of Leviticus. Shemini describes the purification ritual which made the *mishkan* (tabernacle) ready for use as the central site of Jewish religious life during the Israelites' journey through the desert. The story is told of two of the sons of Aaron, who were killed for offering "alien fire" on the altar. The commentators were divided about what their sin was, suggesting among other things, that either:

1. They entered to perform the service while drunk
2. They each brought their own fire without consulting one another or their father, demonstrating egotism, and a lack of respect for their father
3. They brought their own fire, rather than relying on God sending fire to consume the offerings
4. They tried to come too close to God, seeking to fully experience His presence rather than using religious practices as a means of understanding Him.

A significant part of the *parasha* is the discussion of which animals may or may not be eaten, giving us the foundation for the laws of *Kashrut*.

During the coming week, communities throughout the world will observe *Yom Ha-Shoah*, a day of memorial for victims of the Holocaust, and a commemoration of the bravery of the many Jews and Gentiles who resisted the Nazis. This year, *Yom Ha-shoah* falls on Monday night, April 8 - Tuesday, April 9. We urge you to participate in *Yom Ha-Shoah* observances in your community and congregation.

Questions for Your Family's Discussion

When your family sits down together this Shabbat, here are some questions for you to wrestle with:

The laws of *Kashrut*, some of which appear in this week's *parasha*, have been particularly targeted by anti-Semites through the ages. Even today, there are web sites that claim that the symbols, which signify that an item is *Kosher*, represent a "tax" that raises food prices for everyone. As far back as the Hanukkah story, it was the defense of the laws of

Kashrut that served as the rallying cry for the Hasmoneans to rebel against the Syrian-Greeks and their followers, who were offering pigs as religious sacrifices.

1. Why are the laws of *Kashrut* special targets for anti-Semitic attacks?
2. Are the laws of *Kashrut* supposed to make us different from others around us? In what ways?
3. For the Hasmoneans, the laws of *Kashrut* and of proper animal offerings were the "breaking point," causing them to rebel. What are the Jewish practices that would cause you to resist if they were suddenly outlawed?

Yom Hashoah gives us the opportunity to enter a relationship with our recent history. It is a day not of mourning, but of remembrance. We remember those who died, those who survived, and those who fought bravely against the Nazi oppressors.

1. In your family, is there someone who perished in the *Shoah*? What were their stories?
2. Do you know people who survived the *Shoah*? How can we reach out to them, share their stories, and support them?
3. Can you think of places in which Jews resisted the Nazis? Where? How did they resist (consider not only military resistance, but religious practice in the face of oppression, continuing to function as a community, and even artistic creativity as a means of resistance)?

Some texts to Wrestle With

Below are excerpts from a prayer written by Rabbi Leo Baeck, to be read in Germany on Yom Kippur, 1935, as the Nazis were increasing their hold on Germany and its Jewish community:

At this hour the whole House of Israel stands before its God, the God of Justice and the God of Mercy. We shall examine our ways before Him. We shall examine what we have done and what we have failed to do; we shall examine where we have gone and where we have failed to go....We stand before our God and with the same courage with which we have acknowledged our sins...we express our abhorrence of the lie directed against us, and the slander of our faith and its expressions: this slander is far below us. We believe in our faith and our future...

Our history is the history of spiritual greatness, spiritual dignity. We turn to it when attack and insult are directed against us, when need and suffering press in upon us. The Lord led our ancestors from generation to generation. He will continue to lead us and our children through our days...

We stand before our God; we draw strength from His Commandments, which we obey...

What was the power of prayer through which Rabbi Baeck found strength to resist the Nazis? How do you think the power of prayer helped him to survive the Shoah? [Note: Rabbi Baeck was arrested several times by the Nazis, and was in the concentration camp

at Theresienstadt, where he continued to study and teach Torah. He survived to continue his career as a leading rabbi and scholar).

Towards an Action Agenda

Learn about how the Jewish community has responded to those who use *Kashrut* as a tool of anti-Semitism. The Anti-Defamation League has the following site:

http://www.adl.org/special_reports/kosher_tax/kosher_intro.html

Find out about our local Holocaust memorial in Glen Cove. Their home page is:

<http://www.holocaust-nassau.org/main.html>

During the Shoah, thousands of people who were not Jewish helped to save lives, rescuing Jews in countries throughout Europe. Today, many of these "rescuers" are elderly, some living in poverty. The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous was established to assist and support these people who risked their lives for others. To learn how you can help, see:

<http://www.jfr.org/main.html>



Shabbat Shalom!

Please join together in learning with other families by sharing your family's discussions and ideas by posting them on our web site. Simply respond with your thoughts and ideas to RavADS@bjeny.org

If there is any way we can be of service, please contact Rabbi Arnold D. Samlan at the BJE Nassau Queens Center, 516-876-6535, or see our web site: www.bjeny.org

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