

Sermon by Rabbi Eliezer Hirsch Shemini 21 “Practice is Perfect”

Gut Shabbos. Shabbat shalom. First I'd like to acknowledge that this week's sermon is sponsored by Marjie Risman and Ed Letzter, in memory of Marjie's brother Harris Risman (Chaim Uriah ben Yaacov uBedunna) z'l , and in appreciation to the folks who showed up for morning minyan on his yahrtzeit so Marjie could say Kaddish. May his memory be a blessing..

It's interesting that the name of the Parsha that follows an 8-day holiday (outside of Israel, at least) is named 8, *Shemini*. But the 8th day of Pesach is a subject of controversy, because for one thing, those who don't eat gebrochts during the first 7 days will indulge on Shmini shel Pesach, on the 8th day of Pesach. It is as if they give the 8th day a lesser status than the rest of Pesach. We get the same feeling from reading the Parsha, *Shemini*, which literally means *the eighth [day]*, because nothing in the narrative is about commemorating an 8th day of anything. Instead, as Rashi explains, it tells us about the 1st day of the mishkan's consecration on Rosh Chodesh Nisan, which follows the 7 days of *miluim*, preparation.

In Israel, Pesach is only 7 days. As the Maharal explains, the number 7 represents nature, *teva*, the way things work, and the number 8 is considered to be above nature, or supernatural. According to this line of reasoning then, Shavuot serves the same role as *Shemini Atzeret* after Sukkot – it's connected to Pesach through the Omer and regarded as the 8th day. But outside the land of Israel, where Shavuot becomes the 9th day, that equation doesn't work.

However, there is a custom on the 8th day of Pesach in *chutz la'aretz* shared by both the Vilna Gaon and Ba'al shem tov, albeit for entirely different reasons. They each consumed *shalashudis*, a 3rd meal on the last day of Pesach, even though the 3rd meal is only required on Shabbat. The Vilna Gaon's reason was that he held that the pasuk *shivat yamim matzot tocheilu* teaches that eating matzah is a mitzvah for the entire Pesach, not just for the seder (which is why some people have a custom to eat only *shmura matzoh* throughout Pesach). The 8th day is our last opportunity to observe this mitzvah – it's a way to say goodbye, so to speak, to the mitzvah; a way to show we appreciate the matzah, by savoring it and not rushing to get it over with. The Ba'al shem tov called *shalashudis* on Achron shel Pesach *the meal of the Mashiach*. According to our tradition, the Mashiach will come on Pesach, and there will

be a celebration for the week following his arrival. (Some commentators say that's the reason why we don't recite Tachanun the whole month of Nissan.)

We see from these customs from our leaders in chutz la'aretz that there is indeed a special purpose served by celebrating the 8th day of Pesach. It's not just an extra day tacked on at the end.

Similarly, the Yom Hashmini in our parsha reveals this idea about the 8th day as well. Many commentators say it should have been called the first day! It's like spring training in baseball, which is a period of practice, so it's not part of the official record keeping. (I think that's perhaps why Shemini usually falls out during spring training (or at least at the very beginning of baseball season!))

But in our case, calling the day of inauguration *yom hashmini* does not diminish its importance; rather, it gives significance to the first 7 days of practice, because the consecration of the Mishkan is an extension of the days of preparation.

This would explain why the Ramban surprisingly asserts that everything we do in galut doesn't count – it's merely

preparation for when we will fulfil mitzvot in Eretz Yisrael. *Shemini* teaches us that preparation is not secondary; it is on the same level as the event it precedes.

Thus, the Haftorah for the 8th day of Pesach is about mashiach – it's a celebration of chutz la'aretz, the place of preparation, as the catalyst for bringing about mashiach.

Parshat Shemini's message is that practice should not be viewed as simply a means to an end, something subordinate to the actual accomplishment. It is a vital part of the whole story of the Jewish people, which is not defined solely by the endgame, our presence in Israel. Our story is an ongoing saga, and one day, hopefully soon, we will all end up in Eretz Yisrael. In the meantime, we are meant to cherish, and never diminish, the significance of our time in chutz la'aretz, because in our case, practice **is** perfect. Shabbat shalom.