## [Love of the Moment – Parshat Shmini](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/love-of-the-moment-parshat-shmini)

Before Rabbi Dov Baer, (the Maggid of Metzrich) was well known, he lived with his wife and baby in deep poverty. They tried their best to keep mom nourished enough so that there would be milk in her breasts for the baby, but the day came that the baby couldn’t get any milk at all. The baby was hungry, but she was so weak that she was even unable to cry. The Maggid could no longer take it, and for a moment he lost his equanimity and cried out in anguish.

Instantly a voice came from heaven and proclaimed that because he had complained, he had now lost his share in the World to Come. The Maggid smiled and said to himself, “Oh good – now that reward has been done away with, I can finally serve *Hashem* for its own sake!”

Religion often paints a picture of the spirituality as a place of arrival in time; if we are true to the path, we will eventually come to the spiritual fruit, whether we call that fruit *Olam Haba – The World to Come,* or Enlightenment, or Awakening, Peace, or anything else. But the true Peace, the true arrival into Divine consciousness, is actually the dropping away of projecting ourselves in time and *arriving into the present.*

הוּא אֱלהֵינוּ אֵין עוד
*Hu Eloheinu Ayn Od!*
*Existence is our own Divinity, there is nothing else!*

This verse from the *Aleinu* prayer is telling us: *Hu –* that is, Existence as it presents itself in this moment, is *Eloheinu –* it is the Divine we seek, is it the ever-present fruit and goal, wholly available when we arrive into the abundance and fullness of this moment.

There is a hint in the *parsha:*

כִּ֣י הַיּ֔וֹם יְהוָ֖ה נִרְאָ֥ה אֲלֵיכֶֽם
*Because today the Divine will appear to you!*(Leviticus 9:4)

That is, the Divine appears *ki hayom – because* we open to the *today.*

How do we do that?

Simply by letting go of the idea that what we seek is in time, and instead (re)turning attention to what is present, to *hayom.* Let go of the restless movement of the mind, *ki hayom Hashem Nir’ah–* because That which we seek is already appearing, if we would stop looking elsewhere for It.

In this week of *Hesed/Lovingkindness,* the time of counting of the seven weeks between *Pesakh* and *Shavuot,* the holidays of Liberation and Revelation, may we receive this supreme gift that frees us and reveals the Divine Presence ever shining from the silent depths of awareness…

***More on Parshat Shmini…***

[**Just a Spoonful of Honey – Parshat Shmini**
​](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/parshat-shmini)
We know that we must remember to take time for ourselves; if we go on and on serving others only, we will burn out. But when it comes to meditation, taking time for yourself is also an essential service to others. That’s because no matter what you do, the quality of presence that you bring to your actions will have a deep effect on others around you.

There’s a story of that some of Reb Simcha Bunam’s disciples decided to feast together and engage in Torah learning and spiritual conversation. When Reb Simcha observed them in their feast, he noticed there was a slight air of tightness and over-seriousness among them.

“Let me tell you a story” said the rabbi. “Once there was a businessman who wanted to find a new enterprise that would be lucrative. He researched and discovered that making and selling mead would be very profitable, so he set off to a neighboring city and found a master mead maker to train him.

“The businessman spent months learning the craft, and when he was thoroughly trained, he headed back to his home, brewed up his first batch, and invited many people from the town to come to his mead-tasting party. But, when the guests tried it, they winced in disgust. ‘What, you don’t like it? How could that be?’ said the businessman.

“So, he headed back to the city and demanded a refund from the mead maker. ‘Did you do exactly as I taught you?’ the mead maker asked. ‘Yes of course.’ They went over each step carefully, and confirmed that the businessman had done everything correctly. ‘And of course, you added the honey, right?’ asked the mead maker.

“‘Honey? No – you didn’t tell me that.’

“‘You fool! You mean I have to tell you to add honey??’”

No matter how detailed and precise our service in the world is, it will be bitter if we don’t do it with good heartedness – we have to “add the honey.” This is so obvious, and yet many people feel guilty taking the time they need for meditation, learning, prayer and so on.

אָמַר לָהֶם, צְאוּ וּרְאוּ אֵיזוֹהִי דֶרֶךְ יְשָׁרָה שֶׁיִּדְבַּק בָּהּ הָאָדָם. רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר אוֹמֵר, עַיִן טוֹבָה. רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אוֹמֵר, חָבֵר טוֹב. רַבִּי יוֹסֵי אוֹמֵר, שָׁכֵן טוֹב. רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן אוֹמֵר, הָרוֹאֶה אֶת הַנּוֹלָד. רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר אוֹמֵר, לֵב טוֹב. אָמַר לָהֶם, רוֹאֶה אֲנִי אֶת דִּבְרֵי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן עֲרָךְ מִדִּבְרֵיכֶם, שֶׁבִּכְלָל דְּבָרָיו דִּבְרֵיכֶם.

He said to them: Go out and see what is the straight path that a person should cling to. Rabbi Eliezer says: A good eye. Rabbi Yehoshua says: A good friend. Rabbi Yosi says: A good neighbor. Rabbi Shimon says: Seeing the consequences of one’s actions. Rabbi Elazar says: A good heart. He said to them: I see the words of Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh as better than all of yours, because your words are included in his.
-Pirkei Avot 2:8

Cultivating a “good heart,” that is, a conscious heart, is foundational for being of service in the world. There is a hint in this week’s reading:

וַיֹּ֨אמֶר מֹשֶׁ֜ה אֶֽל־אַהֲרֹ֗ן קְרַ֤ב אֶל־הַמִּזְבֵּ֙חַ֙ וַעֲשֵׂ֞ה אֶת־חַטָּֽאתְךָ֙ וְאֶת־עֹ֣לָתֶ֔ךָ וְכַפֵּ֥ר בַּֽעַדְךָ֖ וּבְעַ֣ד הָעָ֑ם וַעֲשֵׂ֞ה אֶת־קָרְבַּ֤ן הָעָם֙ וְכַפֵּ֣ר בַּֽעֲדָ֔ם כַּאֲשֶׁ֖ר צִוָּ֥ה יְהוָֽה׃

Moses said to Aaron: “Come to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and your burnt offering, ***atoning for yourself and for the people;*** and then make the offering for the people and ***atone for them***, as the Divine has commanded…

Strange – it should have said, “atoning for yourself” and then “atone for them,” but instead it says,  “atoning for yourself and the people,” and then “atone for them.” The people get “atoned” for twice – because when you work on yourself, you are also serving others by doing so. Then, only after you have worked on yourself, “atone for them” – meaning, go out and serve in the world with a purified heart…

 [**Drinking from the Well - Parshat Shmini**
​](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/how-much-is-enough-parshat-shmini)
​A disciple of the Seer of Lublin was fasting "from Sabbath to Sabbath." Late Friday afternoon, he came to a well, and became so overcome with thirst that he thought he might die. So, he broke down and was about to draw some water to drink. Suddenly he realized- "Wait! If I drink now, I will have nullified the whole week of fasting! I can wait one more hour until Shabbos!"

So he left the well, despite his intense thirst.

But then he noticed – he was feeling some arrogance for having withstood the test! Better that he drink the water than foster the arrogance, so he went back to the well to drink. But when he got there, he noticed his thirst had vanished. "Never mind!" he thought, and went on his way to the Master's house for Shabbos.

As soon as he entered the house, the Seer looked right at him and said, "wishy washy!"

It's a common practice in the Jewish tradition, as well as nearly all other traditions, to cultivate a sense of transcendence through various forms of asceticism – fasting, celibacy, and so on. The idea is that we tend to be identified with our impulses, cravings, feelings, and opinions, and this creates a sense of narrowness, of being trapped.

​So, in order to dis-identify from these seductive aspects of experience, one can take a break from engaging them and practice simply being in the presence of the feeling or craving or whatever, and not feed it. This is the basic idea behind any restriction-based practices, such as kashrut, not working on Shabbat, and so on: you are bigger than your impulses. They can be powerful, but they can never overpower you if you remember what you actually are: a vast field of awareness, within which your impulses come and go.

But there's a potential trap in this and all practices, in that you can identify with the practice itself and get trapped in feelings of pride or inadequacy, depending on how "good" or "bad" you think you're doing.

The remedy is, keep going with your renunciation right to the core of identification: your own thoughts. The guy in the story renounces food and water for six days (just the daytimes actually, these kinds of fasts permit eating at night), but he doesn't renounce his thoughts about food and water. "I've got to drink! No I can't that would ruin everything! Oh no but now I'm feeling pride, better to drink! Oh no but I don't have to because I'm not thirsty anymore!"

It's all overthinking; he's just exchanged one schtick for another.

Instead, don't just limit your food and drink, limit your mind. Think when necessary or productive, and otherwise accept things and let go. This is the message of this week's S'firat HaOmer, called Gevurah, meaning Strength, Limitation, Boundary. The paradox is that in order to be free and realize yourself as expansiveness, you have to be able to set limits.

There's a hint of this in this week's reading, Parshat Sh'mini. Moses is giving Aaron and the Israelites instructions about certain offerings they must bring, in order that:

כִּ֣י הַיּ֔וֹם יְהוָ֖ה נִרְאָ֥ה אֲלֵיכֶֽם׃ – Ki hayom Hashem nir'ah aleikhem Today the Divine will appear to you.

The first offering is a Hatat – a "sin offering." In other words, if you want to behold the Presence of Being, you have to "let go of your sins" – meaning, stop berating yourself, stop worrying about the past. Come to the present. That's the offering – the limiting of your involvement with your past mistakes.

​The second offering is an Olah - an "elevation offering." In other words, after you let go of the past, you must "elevate" your impulses in the present. Whatever your motive, be it desire or negativity, transform it – up level it – into prayer. See the Divine impulse within every particular impulse, and reframe it through your prayer.

Do you want something? Direct your want to the Divinity of Being as it is manifesting right now.

Are you angry or fearful about something? Direct your feelings in prayer toward their transformation.

It is so important to do some of this every day. That's what the Hassidic master Rebbe Nachman called, hitbodedut.

In Pirkei Avot, 4:1, we read, "Ben Zoma said... who is strong? Koveish et yitzro – One who masters one's own yetzer, one's own motivation."​This is the task in each day: to remember our own masterfulness, that we are infinitely more vast than any particular experience, that we can let go of the past and alchemically transform whatever arises in the present...

[**Give it Up- Parshat Shmini**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/give-it-up-parshat-shmini)

***"And it was on this day of Eternity..."***

Let’s look at what happens when you’re craving something, and then you get what you’re craving. Take food for example. You feel the pain of hunger, the desire to eat something, and then you eat it and feel satisfaction. But there’s something else going on of which you might not be aware unless you’re really paying attention, and that is the sense of incompleteness that’s caused not by the hunger, but by the mental and emotional fixation on the object of your desire. It’s not just that you’re hungry, it’s that there’s a basic dis-ease with the present moment, and a psychological “reaching” for a future moment when you imagine that you’ll be satisfied.

Then, when you finally get what you were craving, not only is there a satisfaction with the experience of the food, there’s also hopefully a relaxing into present moment reality while you enjoy the food, and a dropping away of that dis-ease of wanting. And that simple connection and dropping away of dis-ease is itself very pleasurable, and naturally lovable, even more so perhaps than the food. Now everyone experiences this at least to some degree, but rarely to people realize that what’s going on. Instead, people just assume that all the pleasure comes from the food or whatever particular gratification they’re experiencing.

But the truth is, the deeper pleasure comes not from the food, though food is certainly a wonderful thing, but from the letting go of wanting and instead connecting deeply with the present. That’s why we have practices like fasting, for example, or giving up bread on Pesakh. Normally when we feel a craving, the heart tends to run after what we want and we lose connection with the present. But if you let yourself feel the craving on purpose, returning your attention to your heart again and again so that it doesn’t carry you away, then you can learn to open your heart and drop into the wholeness and bliss of the Present without needing to satisfy whatever urge you’re feeling. In that way, you get to experience Ahavat Hashem- love of God- meaning love of Being or Existence or Reality Itself, because your connection to the Reality of the present is by its nature very pleasurable, healing and liberating.

There’s a hint of this in the Torah reading Parshat Sh’mini. It opens, “Vay’hi bayom hashmini kara mosheh- It was on the eighth day that Moses called out."

Moses then gives instructions to the Israelites for the offerings they should bring in order for them to have a vision of the Divine. It then goes on in great detail about the animals and grains and oils they burned as fire offerings. At the end of this litany it says, “… vayeyra kh’vod Hashem el kol ha’am- the Divine Glory appeared to all the people.”

Why?

When you experience satisfaction such as eating delicious food, you can elevate that experience through gratitude- through realizing that your food is literally a gift from God, emerging from the field of Being. But if you want to experience ahavat Hashem- the love of God that’s there even when you’re not feeling satisfied, you have to differentiate the pleasure that comes from Presence from the pleasure that comes from gratification, and you can do that through sacrifice- through purposely giving something up.

Then, just as the Divine Glory appeared to the Israelites, so you too will perceive the deep satisfaction and bliss of connecting with Reality as it is, beyond all those temporary and finite pleasures, wonderful as they might be. And when you do that, a much deeper gratitude can emerge- gratitude not only for the particular blessings we experience, but for the constant opportunity we have to practice Presence and connect with the completeness and peace of this moment.

This is also hinted at in the opening verse, “Vay’hi bayom hashmini- It was on the eighth day…” Y’hi is a form of the verb “to be.” Bayom means “on the day” but it can also mean “in today” meaning in the Present, and hashmini means, “the eighth.” The number eight on its side is a symbol for infinity. So the idea here is that you connect with the Eternal, hashmini, through Being, y’hi, in the Present, bayom.

So on this Shabbat Shmini, the Sabbath of the Infinite, let’s absorb the lessons of Pesakh, learning to delay and sometimes surrender gratification, opening our hearts to that deeper connection with the Eternal Present.

Good Shabbos!
love
brian yosef

**​**[**The Toes- Parshat Sh'mini**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-toes-parshat-shmini)

Once when I was driving, I saw a man asking for money with a sign that read, “I have three toes- please help.” For an instant, my heart twinged with compassion. But that was immediately followed by a disorienting surprise as I reconsidered his sign.

He needs money because he has three toes?

I immediately thought of Aimee Mullins. Aimee Mullins had both legs amputated when she was one year old. Rather than adopt the identity of a disabled person, she became a star athlete, a model and an inspirational speaker who empowers her listeners to transcend limited thinking and limited identity.

I don’t mean to be uncompassionate to the man with three toes who needed some money, or to imply that it’s no big deal to lose a part of your body. I want to bless that man that he should have relief from any suffering caused by his body or anything else.

But the real disability, as Aimee Mullins and countless others have demonstrated, is not in how many toes or legs you have, but how imprisoned you are by your thoughts. If you narrate your life in negative terms, telling yourself sad stories of victimhood, then that will be the lens through which you live, and that is what will seem to manifest.

On the other hand, if you refuse to accept limiting labels, if you refuse to identify with negative stories, is there any fixed limit to what you can accomplish?

In this week’s reading, Parshat Sh’mini, the Torah narrates the climax of the inauguration ceremony for the priests. Moses tells the Israelites that after the various offerings are brought-

“Hayom Hashem nir’ah aleikhem-
     “Today Hashem will appear to you!”

The offerings are brought, the rites performed, and then it happens-

“Vayeira kh’vod Hashem el ha’am-
     “The glory of the Divine appeared to the people!”

Then something tragic happens: in the ecstasy of the moment, the high priest Aaron’s two sons, Nadav and Avihu, break ranks and rush forward to offer their own incense. A fire streams forth from the Divine and kills them. Moses tells Aaron that Hashem is sanctified and honored by their death. Of Aaron it says-

“Vayidom Aharon- Aaron was silent.”

There’s a story of the Hassidic master Reb Menachem Mendel of Kotsk, the Kotsker Rebbe.

One day, the son-in-law of Reb Shlomo of Radomsk was visiting him. The Kotsker asked his guest to please tell some Torah from his saintly father-in-law, to which he replied with this teaching:

“When Aaron lost his two sons, the Torah records his praise, saying- ‘Vayidom Aharon- Aaron was silent’ because he was able to accept his misfortune with equanimity and not become a victim.

But King David surpassed him and reached an even higher level, as he says in the psalm-

‘L’man y’zamerkha khavod v’lo yidom-
     ‘So that I may sing of Your glory and **not** be silent’-

-for even in times of great distress he would still sing God’s praises.”

This teaching, though somewhat extreme, points to the power of your mind to define the way you frame reality. It also hints at the two basic practices for learning to use your mind.

The silence of Aaron hints at meditation. Through meditation, you learn to free your mind from all the thought forms that tend to imprison most people to some degree.

The praise of David indicates prayer. In prayer, the sacred dimension that’s revealed in meditation is given expression.

These two basic practices together- meditation and prayer- tap into the sacred dimension and draw forth Its nourishment into expression.

The name of this parshah is “Sh’mini” which means “Eighth.” This refers to the eighth day of the ceremony on which the action takes place. The number eight symbolizes infinity, both in its Arabic shape and in its Hebrew meaning as the number that transcends seven, which is the number of finite creation. One of the names of God in Kabbalah is Ayn Sof, which also means Infinite- literally “there is no limitation”. Thus, the Infinite appears to the Israelites on the day of infinity.

And when is the “day of infinity” as it applies to each of us?

“Hayom Hashem nir’ah aleikhem- **today** Hashem will appear to you!”

Today, of course, means now.

In the subsiding of thought, there’s the subsiding of time. In the subsiding of time, there’s the blossoming of the only Reality there is- the Reality of this moment, the one and only moment. This moment is not fixed. Ever changing, it is Ayn sof, without limit, unbound by past and future.

On this Shabbat Sh’mini, this Sabbath of the Infinite, let us co-create this moment not as victims of the many mishaps and tragedies that unfold in time. But rather, from the silent depths of our being, let the voice of God emerge through our voices to praise Its own Mystery…