



Parasha *Shemini*

April 15, 2023

Torah: Leviticus 9:1-11:47

Haftarah: 2Samuel 6:1-7:17

Ketuvim Shlichim: Acts 11:1-10

Shabbat shalom mishpacha! Our *parasha* today is *Shemini*, meaning “eighth.” In *Parasha Tzav*, ADONAI commanded Aaron and his sons to remain in the Tabernacle for the seven days of their consecration. This *parasha* begins the 8th day, the day after the consecration was completed, a day on which ADONAI appeared to Israel. After the offering was placed on the altar, fire came forth from ADONAI and consumed it.

It was then that *Nadav* and *Avihu*, Aaron's sons, decided to take it upon themselves to offer fire before ADONAI. *Torah* says that they: *1 ... offered unauthorized fire before Adonai—which He had not commanded them.* (Leviticus 10:1b TLV). That same holy fire from ADONAI which had just consumed the offerings now came forth from Him again and consumed them. The word translated “consumed” comes from a Hebrew root, *akal*, meaning “to eat.” Their bodies were “eaten,” consumed, by ADONAI's holy fire. Their actions which perverted ADONAI's holiness caused their deaths.

Leviticus chapter 11 describes what is to be eaten and what is not to be eaten by those who are in covenant with ADONAI. Each of us knows what *Torah* tells us regarding what we can eat and what we cannot eat. We don't need to study those details again. We should know. What we must understand is how these verses apply to our spiritual walk? As ADONAI completed His words regarding what is to be eaten, He said: 46 *“This is the Torah of the animal, the bird, every living creature that moves in the waters, and every creature that creeps on the earth, 47 to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean, and between the living thing that may be eaten and the living thing that may not be eaten.”* (Leviticus 11: 46-47 TLV). ADONAI described what may be eaten and what may not be eaten, but something else that He said brings up a question for us. How are we as followers of Yeshua to understand clean and unclean?

In the days of the Tabernacle and the Temple, clean and unclean had a very specific meaning. In those days, you could become unclean by touching something unclean, an object or an animal. It had to do with “ritual cleanness,” which would also include eating something unclean. In the verses we just read, unclean is *tamei*, טָמֵא and *tahor*, טָהוֹר, is clean. An Israelite had to be ritually clean in order to worship ADONAI in the Tabernacle. Because we do not have a Temple or Levitical priesthood today, ritual cleanness is not *Torah* for us. But, in the days of the Temple, worshippers had to purify themselves in the *mikva'ot*, the ritual immersion baths, outside the southern wall of the Temple mount before entering to worship. It had nothing to do with physical cleanness, but was ritual cleanness, a form of spiritual cleanness prescribed by ADONAI. The individual was required to prepare themselves before approaching the Tabernacle or Temple of the holy G-d, rules given under the First Covenant, but rules which do not apply to us today. However, certain rules, certain

mitzvot of the First Covenant, do apply to us today. It is up to us individually to understand which are in effect for us. Don't accept what someone else says without checking it out.

Today, we don't have to physically immerse ourselves in a *mikveh* in order to be ritually clean before entering our sanctuary at *Beit Shalom* for worship on *Shabbat*. Today, it's not about ritual cleanness. ADONAI doesn't require it of us, but we should spiritually prepare ourselves to enter and worship Him. This subject is not often spoken about, but how we present ourselves before ADONAI to worship Him is important, even if many don't realize it. We should be clean in "our spirits" as we come in to worship ADONAI. If you've just had an argument with your spouse and still angry, you're not ready. If you have an offense against someone in your heart, you're not ready. If you have unforgiven sin in your life and your heart is not right before ADONAI, you're not ready to worship Him.

In our Passover *seder* about ten days ago, we washed our hands twice, not for cleanliness of our hands, but to prepare our hearts to receive the emblems of Yeshua's sacrifice. This Scripture was read: *3 Who may go up on the mountain of Adonai? Who may stand in His holy place? 4 One with clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted his soul in vain, nor sworn deceitfully.* (Psalm 24:3-4 TLV). Our washing was not a physical cleansing, but a spiritual statement that we had confessed our sins and forgiven any that we had something against. Regardless of whether it's a Passover *seder* or a *Shabbat* worship service, our hearts must be right. This is about our personal, spiritual confession, a heart check. We should enter with a clean heart.

Our conversation about eating led us to our discussion about having *tahor* hearts, clean hearts. A question about eating also leads us to what happened to *Shimon Kefa* in Acts 10. It all started with a *Shavuot* Day in Jerusalem, the time when the *Ruach Kodesh* fell on *Kefa* and the disciples and 3000 Jews trusted in Yeshua. What happened after that powerful *Shavuot*? Quite a bit. We are told about it in Acts 2 through Acts 9. According to theologians, what happened in those 8 chapters was a period of seven to ten years. We can definitely say that the Church did not begin at Pentecost because all of the participants there were Jews. The story of Gentiles coming into the New Covenant began up to ten years later with a Roman army officer named Cornelius.

Why did ADONAI choose this man and his household to be the first Gentiles to trust in Yeshua? In the Complete Jewish Bible, we are told that he was a "G-d-fearer." He was a *yire shamayim*, a "fearer of heaven," a very specific theological position in the Judaism of the 1st century. G-d-fearers were followers of the G-d of Israel, but had not converted, had not taken the step of becoming full proselytes of Judaism. They had turned away from paganism and worshipped ADONAI only, but had not become converts to Judaism. As a G-d-fearer, Cornelius was sincerely seeking to follow ADONAI and he prayed continually. He also gave *tzedakah* to the Jewish people. ADONAI knew his heart and sent an angel to speak to him. According to the TLV, the angel told Cornelius that his prayers and his *tzedakah* had gone up as a memorial offering before G-d. The CJB puts it a little differently: *4 ... "Your prayers," replied the angel, "and your acts of charity have gone up into God's presence, so that he has you on his mind."* (Acts 10:4b CJB). How do we get on ADONAI's mind? There are many ways, I'm sure, but praying and giving is what did it for Cornelius. We should want to be on "G-d's mind" too. The angel told him to send men to Jaffa to bring back Simon Peter and that he was staying at the house of Simon the tanner.

What happened before Cornelius's men reached the house of Simon is well known, something that most every follower of Yeshua has read or heard about. *Shimon Kefa* also

had a vision. The vision that he had on the rooftop of Simon the Tanner's house is the theme of this whole section of Scripture. The question is, how are we to interpret what Peter heard and saw? *9 The next day, as the soldiers were traveling and approaching the city, Peter went up to the rooftop to pray, at about the sixth hour. 10 Now he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they were preparing something, he fell into a trance. 11 He saw the heavens opened, and something like a great sheet coming down, lowered by its four corners to the earth. 12 In it were all sorts of four-footed animals and reptiles and birds of the air. 13 A voice came to him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." 14 But Peter said, "Certainly not, Lord! For never have I eaten anything unholy or unclean." 15 Again a voice came to him, a second time: "What God has made clean, you must not consider unholy." 16 This happened three times, and the sheet was immediately taken up to heaven.* (Acts 10:9-16 TLV). In the Church today, this is usually taken to mean that ADONAI has declared all foods clean and it was now OK for *Kefa* to eat pork chops. I don't specifically know, but have to think that most in the Church believe that when ADONAI said: "*Stop treating as unclean what God has made clean,*" that He was saying His *Torah* laws had been done away with and all edible things were now clean. Is that true? Did ADONAI declare unclean animals now clean, or was it something else? You know the answer. *Kefa* was an obedient Jew and he followed *Torah* very carefully. When he said "Never have I eaten anything unholy or unclean," he was stating his faithfulness to *Torah* and probably even thinking of Leviticus chapter 11, our *parasha* today, as he said it. ADONAI specifies in this chapter that only certain four-footed animals can be eaten, not all kinds of four-footed animals as the voice said during *Kefa's* vision. Leviticus 11 also tells that "crawling creatures" cannot be eaten and that only specified "jumping insects" are to be food. The *Torah* is very specific. Only certain birds can be eaten and not every kind of wild bird as the voice in the vision said. Because Peter was hungry and waiting for lunch to be prepared, it is understandable that some would make a connection about eating. But that is jumping to a conclusion. If we just wait a few verses, we see that at Cornelius' house Peter has an "aha moment" and suddenly understood the meaning of the vision.

ADONAI told Peter it was OK to go with them. *19 Now while Peter was mulling over the vision, the Ruach said to him, "Look here, three men are looking for you. 20 But get up, go downstairs, and go with them without hesitating, because I Myself have sent them."* (Acts 10:19-20 TLV). To understand Peter's vision we have to understand the Judaism of the 1st century. This was a very big deal to him. To have ADONAI tell him to go somewhere with Gentiles was something new. And, to be told to go and enter the home of a Gentile was something which was just not done by Jews. To a 1st century Jew, a Gentile was a pagan. To them, Gentile meant "idol worshipper." For a Jew, everything about them was unclean, *tamei*. They didn't follow *Torah* with regard to ritual cleanness and they also had foods forbidden by *Torah* in their homes. But, this was not true in Cornelius' case, because he was a "G-d-fearer," and was a strict follower of *Torah*. Even though *Kefa* didn't know that, he obediently followed ADONAI's instructions and went with the three Gentiles.

After *Kefa* entered Cornelius's house, understanding came to him and he then understood what the vision of the sheet meant. Inside the house, he found a large crowd of people. He said to them: *28 ... , "You yourselves know that it is not permitted for a Jewish man to associate with a non-Jew or to visit him. Yet God has shown me that I should call no one unholy or unclean.* (Acts 28b TLV). That was the meaning of the sheet. It was about people, not animals. Peter now understood that the unclean animals, the insects, and the birds in the sheet were a reference to the Gentiles to whom he was being sent. It was about people, not food. ADONAI had declared Gentiles to be clean and acceptable to the leaders of Yeshua's Messianic body. From that point on Yeshua's Jewish disciples understood that

they were to begin to take His message to the Gentiles. It is very clear that this is not about food. Any reasonable person reading it can get the clear understanding which is presented. When *Kefa* went back to Jerusalem and explained his actions, the Messianic Jewish brothers there understood: *18 ... they became quiet, and they glorified God, saying, "Then even to the Gentiles God has granted repentance leading to life!"* (Acts 11:18b TLV). They knew that ADONAI had shown to Peter that the Gentiles could repent of their sins and receive life through Yeshua just as they, the Jews, could. And, from that point on, the disciples began to also take the message to the Gentiles.

Many in Yeshua's body today use the writings of Matthew Henry to determine how they are to understand and follow Scripture. His writings are well respected. Reverend Henry was a British "nonconformist" minister and author who lived from 1662-1714. Nonconformist means that he was other than Anglican, a Protestant, in fact, his father had been an Anglican priest and was kicked out of the Anglican Church for his nonconformist views. Their views were what we would today consider traditional. They just did not want to be controlled by the state church.

Why reference Matthew Henry today? Doesn't he usually say what the Church wants to hear with regard to the "Old Covenant" and *Torah* being done away with? We will see. ADONAI prophesied the New Covenant through Jeremiah. There are two sentences underlined in the following Scripture. It is extremely important that we understand what ADONAI meant in these two sentences. Jeremiah said: *32 "But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days" —it is a declaration of Adonai— "I will put My Torah within them. Yes, I will write it on their heart, I will be their God and they will be My people.* (Jeremiah 31:32 TLV). We in Messianic Judaism understand those two sentences to refer to the *Torah* commands given in the First Covenant which are still to be obeyed today. We don't call it "old" because parts of it are still in effect. Many in the Church might be surprised to learn what Matthew Henry said about the New Covenant and especially the verses to which we just referred. He said: "He promises, (1.) That he will incline them to their duty; *I will put my law in their inward part and write it in their heart*; not, I will give them a new law (as Mr. Gataker well observes), for *Christ came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it*; but the law shall be written in their hearts by the finger of the Spirit as formerly it was written in the tables of stone. God writes his law in the hearts of all believers, makes it ready and familiar to them, at hand when they have occasion to use it, as that which is *written in the heart*. He makes them in care to observe it, for that which we are solicitous about is said to lie near our hearts. He works in them a disposition to obedience, a conformity of thought and affection to the rules of the divine law, as that of the copy to the original." (Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible (Complete) Online). Reverend Henry said that Mr. Gataker, whoever he was, well knew that it was not a new law and connected the laws written on our hearts to *Torah*. Reverend Henry said: "for *Christ came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it*;" his reference to Yeshua's statement: *17 "Do not think that I came to abolish the Torah or the Prophets! I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. 18 Amen, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or serif shall ever pass away from the Torah until all things come to pass."* (Matthew 5:17-18 TLV). ADONAI said "My laws are written in your hearts," but in order to realize it, we must correctly understand Scripture. Matthew Henry makes it clear that the *Torah* laws are for followers of Jesus. I repeat this that he said: "God writes his law in the hearts of **all believers**, makes it ready and familiar to them, at hand when they have occasion to use it, as that which is *written in the heart*. He makes them in care to **observe it**, for that which we are solicitous about is said to lie near our hearts." The underlines and bolds are mine. It is very clear that Reverend Henry thought

exactly the way we do with regard to this Scripture. I also read his comments regarding Acts 10. His writing about Peter's vision and the sheet coming down did not mention food at all and correctly related the perceived uncleanness which *Kefa* saw in the sheet to Gentiles whom ADONAI wished to bring into His New Covenant. The Church has the right to interpret Scripture (Matthew 16) and individual Christians the right to choose what they will believe. This is not a condemnation of what they believe, but a prayer, hoping for more searching of the Scriptures rather than just accepting general belief.

The overall intent of this message about obedience is about us, Messianic Jews and Gentiles and our having clean hearts. Having a clean heart also relates to what we eat. When a sheet with unclean animals was presented to *Shimon Kefa* with the words, "kill and eat," he responded strongly: *14 ...*, "*Certainly not, Lord! For never have I eaten anything unholy or unclean.*" (Acts 10:14b TLV). Our response should be just as strong as *Kefa's* regarding what we eat. ADONAI's message to Peter with the sheet was not about food, but he initially thought it was and he responded according to what his heart told him. It's a heart thing for us too. As followers of Yeshua under the New Covenant, ADONAI's laws have been written on our hearts. As Reverend Henry said: "With the finger of G-d as He had written on the stone tablets." We no longer have a Temple or Levitical priesthood and because we don't, we are not charged by ADONAI as *tamei*, unclean, if we touch a mouse or a lizard or any kind of non-kosher bug. But, is there a condition of spiritual *tamei* which we should be observing? What did Yeshua say about it?

When a group of Pharisees questioned Him because His disciples did not wash their hands the way that they, the Pharisees, prescribed, Yeshua responded to them. At that time, if Yeshua or His disciples inadvertently touched something unclean or were to enter the Temple, they followed the purity laws of the *Torah*. But, this was something different. These Pharisees had added to *Torah* from what they called "oral *Torah*," laws supposedly passed down by mouth from Moses and kept by memory until it was finally written down in 200 CE, some 170 years after Yeshua's time. Yeshua's disciples did not wash their hands before eating in the way that the Pharisees prescribed. Yeshua responded to the Pharisees question, "Why don't they?" *10 Then Yeshua called the crowd and said to them, "Hear and understand. 11 It's not what goes into the mouth that makes the man unholy; but what comes out of the mouth, this makes the man unholy."* (Matthew 15:10-11 TLV). *15 "There is nothing outside the man that can make him unholy by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of the man that makes the man unholy."* (Mark 7:15 TLV). Both of these Scriptures are about the same event. The word which the TLV translated as unholy in Matthew is *koinoi* (koy-no'-ee). In Mark, it is *koinōsai* (koy-no'-sa-ee). Both come from *koinoó*, (koy-no'-o) meaning common which can be used to mean "make unclean, pollute, desecrate." It's what comes out of a man which can make him unclean, *tamei*. Yeshua said that it's what comes out of our hearts and our mouths which makes us unclean. The point He was making was that ADONAI does care about what's in our hearts. He said that nothing outside of a person can defile him, specifically not unwashed hands. There was a Temple when Yeshua made these statements, so what applies today is different externally, physically. We don't get "ritually unclean" today. But, we can get unclean internally, in our hearts. Today, whether a person is clean or unclean is a matter of the heart. What we eat does not determine spiritual purity, but what comes out of our mouths does, because that reveals what is in our hearts.

This event about unwashed hands had nothing to do with kosher or non-kosher. Both the Pharisees and Yeshua's disciples only ate kosher foods. Yeshua explained this to His disciples. The two versions are slightly different. Matthew reported that what comes out of

the heart are: “evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, and slander.” Mark said that it was: “evil intentions, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustfulness, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness.” How does this relate to us as followers of Yeshua? All of these things are forbidden for followers of Yeshua. What do you call these things which Yeshua named? You call them sin. We can have these thoughts in our hearts even if they don’t manifest physically. What we think is important. Is it permissible to say that what’s in our hearts can be either *tamei* or *tahor*, unclean or clean? Yes, of course. What we are really talking about when we talk about our hearts is how they direct us in righteous living which also includes righteous thinking.

How can we live righteously? First, we must study and understand Scripture and Yeshua has upheld and clarified how His followers are to live. ADONAI has very specifically laid out the way He wants us to live in all of Scripture. We can’t just rely on what someone said for our issues of life. We are charged to do it for ourselves. (2Timothy 2:15). And, then after we have learned what *Torah* requires of us, we must be obedient. And, then we must be obedient. As Messianic Jews and Gentiles today, we understand that after salvation, *Torah* laws which do not require a Temple or Levitical priesthood are for us. ADONAI requires us to obey the kosher laws in Leviticus 11 in the same way that the Ten Commandments are for us today. And, He has written them on our hearts. But, we are not perfect and sometimes we sin. Everyone does, even after salvation.

What should our response to our daily sins be? Our response should be repentance and asking for forgiveness. *Yochanan* said: *8 If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.* (1John 1:8 TLV). In reading what was written before, it is apparent that John wrote this letter to believers. This verse is not about salvation, but about everyday life. He continues by saying: *9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* (1John 1:9 TLV). “He” is Yeshua, who forgives our confession of sin. This is not about salvation. It’s about our daily walk. We must confess our sins whenever we find that we have sinned. Yeshua said to the congregation at Ephesus: *5 “Remember then from where you have fallen. Repent and do the deeds you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your menorah from its place—unless you repent.”* (Revelation 2:5 TLV). While this was written to a congregation, it obviously had to do with its leader and the congregants who had fallen and needed to repent. Everyone starts out well, but can lapse into less than holy behavior. The congregation at Ephesus apparently did that while overall, Yeshua was positive about them. But, He said that they had changed and needed to “Repent.” The Greek is *metanoēson* (met-an-o-eh'-son) meaning “to change one’s mind, to repent.” Yeshua’s words to Ephesus could very well be to the Body of Messiah today which matches what Yeshua said: *“Remember then from where you have fallen.”* We pray for repentance in Yeshua’s body and for revival for those who once sincerely trusted in Yeshua, but fell away.

In our *parasha* at the end of Leviticus chapter 11, after ADONAI had explained all of the dos and don'ts with regard to clean and unclean, He said this: *44 “For I am Adonai your God. Therefore, sanctify yourselves, and be holy, for I am holy. You are not to defile yourselves with any kind of creeping thing that moves on the earth. 45 For I am Adonai who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. Therefore, you should be holy, for I am holy.”* (Leviticus 11:44-45 TLV). Israel was told that because ADONAI rescued them from Egypt, they were required to serve only Him. That's what holy means; to be “set apart” to serve Him only. It's the same with us. Because Yeshua saved us from the Egypt of this world, gave us life, eternal life, we are to be holy; set apart for Him only. *Nadav* and *Avihu* are witnesses to

us. Uzzah in our *Haftarah* today is a witness to us. Be careful that we don't overstep our bounds. And, what is in our hearts does matter. We should not be walking around with unconfessed sin, especially when we approach ADONAI to worship Him. Even as followers of Yeshua, we can have *tamei* thoughts, uncleanness, in our hearts. We must confess it as sin so that our hearts are *tahor*, clean before ADONAI. Yeshua bought and paid for us by His death: *20 For you were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body.* (1Corinthians 6:20 TLV). It is not only our duty, but also should be our desire to glorify ADONAI by what we think, what we say, what we eat and what we do. When we speak of "clean hands," it is symbolism which refers to not only our whole body, but also our minds. Our bodies and our lives must be dedicated to ADONAI. Not only is it our duty, but should be our fervent desire. *Shabbat shalom!*