



Sicha Summary

Chelek 17 | Shmini | Sichas 3

The Context:

Tragedy struck in the midst of the last day of the inauguration of the *Mishkan* when two of Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu, died suddenly. Under normal circumstances, a *kohen* who is an *onen* — a person in mourning for a close relative on the day of that relative's demise and burial — may not partake of sacred sacrifices. There were several sacrifices that were to be brought on that final day of the inauguration. Two of these were unique, one-time sacrifices, in honor of the *Mishkan's* inauguration. The third was a standard, routine sacrifice in honor of Rosh Chodesh.

Moshe commanded Aharon and his sons to eat the meal offering of those two exceptional sacrifices, even though they were mourning that day for their sons and brothers.

They obeyed Moshe's command with respect to the two inaugural offerings, but on their own volition, they decided to burn the Rosh Chodesh sacrifice and not partake of it due to their status as *onenim*.

When Moshe learned of this, he confronted Aharon and asked why he and his sons did not partake of the Rosh Chodesh sacrifice.

Aharon responded that he understood Moshe's command to apply to the one-time sacrifices, but not to perpetual, routine sacrifices such as the Rosh Chodesh sacrifice. (*Vayikra* 10:1-19)

The Torah concludes, "Moshe heard, and it pleased him." (*Vayikra*, 10:20)

The Rashi:

And it pleased him — Moshe admitted that Aharon was correct, and Moshe was not ashamed to say, “I did not hear this law.”

The Commentators:

Commentators on Rashi understand his explanation as follows:

“Moshe admitted that Aharon was correct, and Moshe was not ashamed. For if he was ashamed, he could have covered up by saying, “I have not heard of this law.” [Rather, Moshe was forthright with Aharon, and said, ‘You are right! I did hear that an *onen* may not eat from the type of sacrifices that will be offered in perpetuity, but I forgot!’”] (*Re'em, Gur Aryeh*, based on *Zevachim* 101a)

The Questions:

- 1) Why would Rashi, whose intention is to clearly explain the straightforward meaning of the text, convey his commentary in such vague, opaque language?
- 2) Why did Rashi need to comment on this verse in the first place? What is unclear about this verse that needs clarification?

The Explanation:

The complication in the verse is the seemingly unnecessary addition, “and it pleased him.” The words “Moshe heard” do not refer to Moshe physically hearing the words, because why would the Torah need to state the obvious? Rather, it clearly means that Moshe accepted Aharon’s argument. What, then, is added by the Torah saying, “and it pleased him?”

Rashi’s comment clarifies that Moshe was so pleased with Aharon’s presentation of the law that he gladly admitted to Aharon and to the others that he was ignorant of the law at the time.

Rashi is to be understood simply: “Moshe admitted that Aharon was correct, and Moshe was not ashamed to say, ‘I did not hear this law.’”

If Moshe was embarrassed, he could have either silently accepted Aharon's reasoning, or he could have verbally accepted it without admitting that "I did not hear this law." The Torah here praises Moshe for not being ashamed to admit his ignorance. This is the meaning of the seemingly superfluous phrase, "and it pleased him."

Moshe and Aharon's Deeper Debate:

The *Midrash* identifies Moshe as a paragon of truth, and Aharon as a paragon of kindness. (*Shemos Rabbah* 5:10) Truth is uncompromising. If something is true in one context, it must be true in every context. Kindness, on the other hand, is pliant and discerning. That which is kind in one context may be cruel in another. If a person seeks to do an act of kindness, he must evaluate each situation individually and tailor his giving accordingly.

Thus, Moshe, who applied truth universally, saw no distinction between a one-time sacrifice and a perpetual sacrifice. If the law is that a Kohen who is an *onen* must partake of the one-time sacrifice, the same should apply to a perpetual sacrifice. Or, more broadly, if a certain level of sanctity can be reached in one context, it must be aspired to in every context.

Aharon, however, who in accordance with his attribute of kindness was discerning in applying the law, understood that there are distinctions in people's spiritual capacity. Just because a certain level of sanctity was able to be achieved in one context, Aharon understood that this standard would not be expected of everyone, at all times.

In the end, Moshe concurred with Aharon. He understood that in the real world, each person can find some element of spiritual truth in their own life, and that the objective of Moshe's own uncompromising truth was to filter through to each person individually, and to illuminate their lives according to their unique human capacities.