



Torah Reflections: Conversations on the Weekly Parsha
Parshat Ki Tisa, 5785: Balancing Material and Spiritual

Integrating Torah into one's life through reflection and conversation can be an incredibly fun and engaging experience. It's a journey of discovery, where ancient wisdom and timeless teachings come to life in our daily experiences. Through reflection, we have the opportunity to dive deep into the rich tapestry of Torah, extracting profound insights and lessons that resonate with our modern lives. The joy lies in the 'aha' moments, those instances when a Torah verse or story suddenly connects with our personal challenges, aspirations, and values. And when we engage in conversations about Torah with others, it becomes an interactive exploration, where diverse perspectives and interpretations enhance our understanding. These dialogues often spark excitement and intellectual curiosity, making the learning process both enjoyable and fulfilling. Torah becomes a vibrant and dynamic part of our lives, offering not just guidance but also a source of endless fascination, connection, and growth.

NOTE: Don't feel obligated to go through every source or answer all the questions—unless you want to. Even one source, or one question will give you plenty of material for discussion and meditation. Enjoy this!

Some thoughts about Parshat Shemini

Boundaries, Creativity, and the Dangers of Innovating Divine Law

In *Parshat Shemini*, the Torah describes the sudden and shocking death of Nadav and Abihu, two sons of Aaron who brought an incense offering “that had not been commanded” (Leviticus 10:1). Though their intentions may have been pure—driven by spiritual longing or ecstasy—their act was not authorized by G-d, and they were consumed by divine fire.

Immediately after, G-d instructs the priests not to serve while intoxicated. This links their sin not just to emotional overreach, but to a misjudgment rooted in altered perception, where enthusiasm replaced obedience.

The deeper message here is the prohibition against “*chidush dat*”—creating new religious practices or obligations that G-d did not command. Rambam (Hilchot Melachim 10:9) and Meiri (on Sanhedrin 58b) both articulate this principle clearly in the context of Noahide law: non-Jews are not permitted to invent ritual commandments or simulate Jewish mitzvot, such as observing Shabbat or instituting new festivals. Doing so crosses a line, turning personal devotion into unauthorized religious innovation.

Yet—and this is critical—this does not mean that Noahides must limit themselves to a dry or mechanical spiritual life. The Meiri and later authorities recognize that voluntary acts of devotion are permitted—and even praiseworthy—so long as they are not formalized as religious obligations or practiced in a way that mimics the uniquely Jewish covenantal role.

In other words: Noahides can be creative in their spiritual practice, as long as they stay within the framework of the Seven Laws and do not present their customs as divinely mandated law.



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The lesson from Nadav and Abihu is clear for everyone: fervor without submission to G-d's will can lead to missteps, even destruction. But obedience without any soul or creativity misses the point as well. The balance is to serve with both reverence and initiative, but to always let G-d define the borders.

May we be blessed to walk the fine line between reverence and creativity, honoring G-d's boundaries while expressing our love and awe through meaningful and sincere acts of devotion.

Now, reflect on the following questions:

1. What motivates people to create new religious practices, and how can we distinguish between healthy devotion and prohibited innovation?
2. How can a Noahide express spiritual creativity without crossing into territory reserved for the Jewish covenant?
3. Why is it important to allow G-d—not the individual—to define what counts as a commanded religious obligation?
4. What does the story of Nadav and Abihu teach about the risks of unregulated inspiration?
5. How can structure and obedience enhance—rather than limit—personal connection to Hashem?

Shabbat Shalom!