After the Moment: Living the Eighth Day

Parashat Shemini

Shabbat Shalom,

There is a rhythm to meaningful moments in our lives.

We prepare for them. We study, plan, rehearse, anticipate.

And then the moment arrives.

A wedding. A graduation. A bar mitzvah. A holiday. A turning point we've been working toward.

And then it passes.

What remains is a question we don't always like to ask.

Now what? What's next?

That question sits at the center of this week's Torah portion, Shemini.

Shemini means "eighth."

Seven, we understand. Seven is completion. Creation unfolds over seven days. Shabbat marks the fullness of that cycle.

But eight is different.

Eight is what comes after completion. It's not a new beginning, we're not back to one. It's the next chapter. All the knowledge and experience are there with us, now how will it guide us forward?

In our parasha, the people have spent seven days preparing the Mishkan, the Tabernacle. Every detail attended to. Every ritual performed.

And then the Torah begins:

Vay'hi bayom hashmini

"And it was on the eighth day…"

Because the Torah is less interested in the moment of perfection than in what follows it.

What happens when preparation ends and life begins.

There is a teaching that if seven represents wholeness, eight represents something beyond it.

We see this in Jewish life. A child enters the covenant on the eighth day, not the seventh. Because something more is taking place, something that carries the past forward but changes it.

Rabbi Harold Kushner writes that the eighth day marks the move from heightened spiritual experience into ordinary life. But it is not the same ordinary life as before. It is a life shaped by what we have encountered.

The people standing at the Mishkan on the eighth day are not the same people who left Egypt.

They have received Torah. They have built something sacred.

Now they have to live with it.

That is the eighth day.

Gideon, that is where you are today.

What you have done until now has been your seven days.

You studied. You practiced. You prepared. You showed up.

And this Shabbat, you have and will stand here and lead us with confidence and care.

It's beautiful.

And now comes the part that matters most.

Not what you just did.

But what you will do next. Sorry I'm sure you want to bask in the glow of the Bar Mitzvah you've worked so hard for, your parents and grandparents have longed for, but today is your eighth day, your next chapter begins now.

And it is not only yours.

Every person in this room knows what it means to arrive at a moment we worked toward, only to discover that the real question comes afterward.

What happens when there is no script? Seth you might be most familiar with that?

It is one thing to prepare for a meaningful moment.

It is another to live in its shadow.

Our parasha captures both the promise and the complexity of that transition.

On the eighth day, a fire comes forth from God and consumes the offering. The people see it, and they rejoice. It is a moment of connection, of confirmation.

It worked.

All that preparation led to something real.

We know that feeling. Moments when something opens, when we feel connected to each other, to something larger than ourselves.

But the Torah does not leave us there.

On that same day, Nadav and Avihu, Aaron's sons step forward with what the Torah calls a "strange fire," and something goes terribly wrong.

And Aaron is silent.

Vayidom Aharon.

We do not fully understand what happened, neither does Aharon.

And maybe that is the point.

The eighth day is not controlled, it's not scripted or planned

You can prepare carefully, build something meaningful, and still find yourself facing what you did not anticipate.

That is part of adulthood. There is a Yiddish proverb, “people plan and God laughs”. Maybe that too is part of the eighth day?

The eighth day requires something more than preparation.

It asks for presence. For humility. For responsibility.

It asks whether what we have experienced and learned thus far will actually shape how we live.

Gideon, today you stepped into the story of the Jewish people.

The question now is how you will carry that story, the story of our people into your life.

Into your friendships.

Into your choices.

Into how you show up as a Jew in the world.

That is your eighth day.

And for all of us, the question is the same:

What will I do with what I have already been given?

Gideon, may this moment be the beginning of a life of Jewish meaning, not defined by a single day, but by the days that follow.

And for all of us, may we have the courage to step into our own eighth days.

To take what we have learned, what we have experienced and to let it write the first pages of the next chapter of our life, a chapter that begins on page 8.

Shabbat Shalom.