

Leviticus 9

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On the 8th day, Moses finishes his work in the Tent of Meeting and Aaron takes up his role as High Priest. Jewish festivals are often 8 days in length and the covenant of circumcision is performed on the 8th day. Symbolically it is perfection plus one. The presence of the Lord was the final goal of all the elaborate rituals and ceremonies of the previous seven days. Moses says that today the Lord will appear to you. This raises the questions: how will He appear and where has He been all this time if He is only appearing now? Surely the Lord has been leading and guiding the people since the departure from Egypt.

In trying to fathom the mystery of God's presence; we know that the Lord had instructed the building of the Tabernacle, yet the text literally says that God wanted to dwell in them and not it. Moses now says the Lord will appear yet the people assemble before the Lord. In the mystery, we see that God is both present and His presence will come in glory. First, though, the people, the altar, and the sanctuary have to be purified and atonement made. Moses calls for Aaron to draw near, begging the question where was he? In Jewish exegesis, the commentators note how ashamed Aaron was at constructing the Golden Calf. This is actually a beautiful picture of God's mercy and forgiveness. Despite his sin and shame, the Lord calls forth Aaron to serve before him, and Aaron has been purified and made holy by the blood on him and his garments. Aaron now takes the blood of various sacrifices and places it on the right side of the altar. Both the priest and the altar were part of the same sacrificial system. The priest was a kind of living altar and was consecrated with blood in the same manner as the physical structure. Aaron lifts his hands and blesses the people. One of the priestly functions is to bring the people into the presence of the Lord and to return to the people the blessings of God.

Which blessing did he use to bless the people? While the text in Leviticus does not say, the traditional exegesis notes it was the Aaronic benediction from Numbers 6. Moses and Aaron then return inside the Tent of Meeting, although no explanation is provided as to why. Perhaps this is Aaron's first time inside the Mishkan? Perhaps Moses instructs him on how to prepare the unique incense that is used before the Holy of Holies? Or how to prepare the Menorah? They emerge to once again bless the people. Interestingly we see two advents and two occasions of blessing. then the glory of the Lord appears. The glory, *kavod*, means weight or heavy. God is heavy in goodness, purity, holiness, love, mercy, etc. In all His characteristics He is heavy and full of. How does the Lord appear to the people of Israel? Through fire! Fire proceeds from the presence of the Lord and consumes the offerings on the altar. The fire on the altar was to be an eternal flame. God begins the process and a partnership continues with humans as our task is to tend the flame started by heaven and keep it alight on earth. The people are not afraid; rather the emotion they have is joy at God's presence, with the immediate response of worship.