

## Torah Portion Preview for Sh'mini

*Shabbat beginning April 14, 2023*

Sh'mini, on the eighth (day), Moses gave Aaron and his sons instructions for making and teaching about sacrifices. Fire consumed Aaron's sacrifice, but two of his sons brought "alien fire," different from their instructions. When used for their sacrifice, it consumed them. Aaron remained in stunned silence while Moses, attributing the event to God, warned Aaron and his other two sons to leave the mourning to the people. The remainder of the portion gives further instructions to priests for treating sacrifices and details for distinguishing impure from pure (kosher) animals, birds, fish, and insects.

Few commentators on this portion begin other than with the burning of Aaron's two sons. Some emphasize the special obligations of priests. In *The Mussar Torah Commentary*, Rabbi Jonathan Kraus writes of silence. Being stunned into silence cannot last without moral rejection. Overusing silence to avoid consequences becomes the evil of cowardice. Even silence as principled restraint can become overdone since excess deep thinking breeds stagnation. Rabbi Kraus encourages silence as a "mindfulness tool for insight and healing," for in times of tragedy it enables us to "hear the song of our souls and the voice of [their] Author." Only when successful should we break it.