SUMMARY OF PARASHAT SHEMINI

: THE DIVINE REVELATION IN THE MISHKAN
Moshe gathers all the Jews in the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, to witness the Divine Presence revealed in the Sanctuary. Aharon, Moshe's brother, and the High Priest, offers various sacrifices in preparation for this event. After concluding the offering of all the sacrifices, Aharon blesses the people with the priestly blessing (Birkat Cohanim). Moshe joins Aharon and together they again bless the people of Israel, after which the Divine presence is visibly perceived above the Tabernacle. How? A heavenly fire (light?) descends and consumes the offerings that were on the altar. The people are overwhelmed with emotion upon perceiving this heavenly fire as a sign of acceptance of the sacrifices, offered by the Almighty.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE SONS OF AHARON
Aharon's two eldest sons, Nadab and Abihu, bring an offering of the "Ketoret" incense that had not been sanctioned or authorized. Consequentially, a heavenly fire engulfs them. Moshe orders the removal of their bodies from the Tabernacle and instructs Aaron and his two remaining sons not to observe the traditional laws of mourning; they had to continue serving in the Sanctuary on behalf of the Jewish nation. The priests are instructed not to drink wine before performing the temple service, this juxtaposition possibly implies that Nadab and Abihu were intoxicated while bringing their faulty offering. Moshe addresses Aharon and his two sons, instructing them to consume the offerings for that day, despite the death of their relatives. Moshe notices that one of the sin offerings had been burned, rather than consumed. When he expresses his surprise, Aharon explains his reasoning for ordering that particular offering to be burned, and Moshe humbly accepts Aharon's explanation.

THE DIET OF THE JEWS
The Torah instructs us about Kashrut, the dietary restrictions

that the Jewish people must observe. The Text teaches us how to distinguish the species of animals, fish, and birds that are clean from those that are impure. The “pure” terrestrial animals have their hooves split in two; such as cows, sheep, and goats. The Torah lists four exceptional animals that have only one of these characteristics and are therefore not “pure;” such as the pig, which has split hooves but does not chew its’ cud. Fish to be Kosher (aside from being deemed as a “clean” animal) must have fins and scales. The Torah then mentions a list of unclean, non-kosher bird species, and the Text concludes this section by mentioning certain types of lobsters (it does not refer to sea lobsters but to four species of Orthoptera) that are considered fit for consumption.

PURITY AND HOLINESS

The Text then discusses the ritual impurity caused by coming into contact with the carcass of an impure animal, as well as certain species of rodents and amphibian creatures. The Torah also indicates that clean food and eating utensils are liable to contract ritual impurities if they come into contact with any of the impure animals mentioned above. Likewise, the impurity that can be contracted when coming into contact with the corpse of an animal that, although pure, was not ritually sacrificed (nebela or terefa), is described. Insects and reptiles are not suitable for consumption. The Torah explains that by observing the Kashrut diet we will be condemned as “holy” that is, socially and culturally separated from pagan peoples and practices. The holiness that comes from abstaining from forbidden foods also refers to impulse control and self-discipline