

## The Death of the Sons of Aharon

The Torah tells us about the death of Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon Ha'Kohen, in Parshas Shemini. They offered a private Ketores offering that Hashem did not request (as generally only Ketores offerings from the public are allowed to be offered). We find additional reasons in Chazal regarding why they were liable to be killed. There are many opinions, such as an opinion that says that they ruled in front of Moshe Rabeinu, while others say they entered the Mikdash while intoxicated.

When the Nesi'im brought their offerings for the dedication of the Mishkan, they too brought private Ketores offerings. The Passuk (*Bamidbar 7:14*) states, "One spoonful, weighing ten units of gold, full of incense." Rashi points out that we never find an individual bringing such an offering. Furthermore, such an offering is never brought upon the outside altar. These two conditions were lifted as per a "one time" exception. They also brought a Chatas offering, which is never brought by choice. In fact, one who volunteers such a sacrifice is actually transgressing the violation against offering unholy sacrifices in the Azarah (of the Beis Hamikdash). Despite all this, the Nesi'im saw through their levels of Ruach Ha'Kodesh (Divine spirit), that these laws must be suspended in order to bring the Shechinah down into the Mishkan. Hashem instructed Moshe Rabbeinu to accept the offerings brought by the Nesi'im.

We find a similar incident involving Shlomo Ha'Melech during the dedication ceremony of the Beis Hamikdash. Shlomo Ha'Melech made a lavish feast for all of Klal Yisrael which lasted fourteen days, culminating on Shemini Atzeres. This means that the feast also took place during Yom Kippur. The Gemara in Moed Katan (*9a*) reveals that Klal Yisrael was concerned that perhaps they had violated the prohibition against eating on Yom Kippur. To alleviate their concerns, a heavenly voice called out, saying, "You are all welcomed into Olam Haba." Shlomo Hamelech saw with his Ruach Ha'Kodesh, that such a feast in honor of the dedication of the Beis Ha'Mikdash had to take place on Yom Kippur.

The allowance for such events is explained in Yevamos (90b). We are told that Eliyahu Ha'Navi brought an offering upon a Bamah (an altar outside the Beis Hamikdash), at a time when this was forbidden according to Torah law. He did this in order to strengthen our religion (by proving in front of all of Bnei Yisrael at Mount Carmel that Hashem was the true G-d, and that idolatry is meaningless). Tosfos explains that just as this would be allowed if ordered by Hashem, if the situation called for such action, so too, it is allowed without a direct order from Hashem. Eliyahu Hanavi understood that he had to act in such a way, at that exact time. This was also what occurred with the Nesi'im and with Shlomo Ha'Melech. Through their Divine spirit, they knew they had to perform acts that are normally forbidden, in order for the Shechinah to come and dwell within the walls of the Mishkan and the Beis Ha'Mikdash, and in order to strengthen the nation.

This is also the explanation regarding the actions of Nadav and Avihu. They understood that their offering was going to facilitate the Shechinah's descent into the Mishkan, just as the Nesi'im had done. However, the difference between them and Shlomo Hamelech, Eliyahu, and all other great Tzadikim who issued such rulings, is that in this situation they were not worthy of issuing such a ruling. In *Michtav Me'Eliyahu*, (*Book 2, Pg.244*), Rav Dessler *zt"l* lists fifteen different reasons as to why they were punished for their actions. Each of these sins are objectively very minute. However, Hashem is exacting with such righteous people to the degree of a hairsbreadth.

The Seforno sheds more light on this topic. He explains that Nadav and Avihu thought that since the Ketores is normally offered after the Tamid offering, and the Tamid offering brings the Shechinah to Klal Yisrael, so too, they should offer the Ketores after the Shechinah descended on Klal Yisrael. [The Shechinah had just appeared to Klal Yisrael, and a fire from Heaven consumed the offerings of Aharon (and remained on the altar).] This is why they offered the Ketores. Their only sin was not being commanded to do so.

This is the explanation of the opinion that they ruled before Moshe Rabeinu. In other words, they should have asked Moshe Rabeinu if this was an appropriate course of action. Not doing so caused their sacrifice to be considered “a strange fire.”

Even though they had not yet been commanded not to be intoxicated while serving in the Beis Ha’Mikdash, they should have known this on their own.

## Judging the Righteous

The Passuk states (*Vayikra 10:2*) regarding Nadav and Avihu, “And they died before Hashem.” This means that when they died, they were on the high level of “(i.e. standing) before Hashem.” All of their actions were based on the Passuk, “Shivisi Hashem l’Negdi Samid” – “I place Hashem before me always.” The commentaries explain that their sin was very small indeed. They brought this incense for the sake of Heaven, as they thought this was permitted just this once (in order to bring the Shechinah into the Mishkan).

The Pasuk states (*ibid. 10:3*), “And Moshe said to Aharon, this is what Hashem said to say over, “With my close ones I shall be sanctified.” Rashi there explains, “Moshe said to Aharon, “Aharon my brother! I knew that the Mishkan would be sanctified by someone close to Hashem, and I thought this would be either me or you. Now I see that they are greater than me or you.” In other words, all of the small sins that are attributed to Nadav and Avihu were not enough to cause them to be killed. Even so, they died in order that they would sanctify Hashem’s name, and the Shechinah would come down to the Mishkan.

This means that before the death of Nadav and Avihu, Klal Yisrael were not worthy of bringing the Shechinah to the Mishkan. All of the merits of Moshe and Aharon were not enough. Only the death of Nadav and Avihu allowed the Shechinah to come into the Mishkan. When Bnei Yisrael saw that even Nadav and Avihu were punished, it strengthened their Yiras Shamayim, making them worthy for the Shechinah to enter the Mishkan.

This is what Moshe meant when he said, “Now I see that they are greater than me or you.” Is it possible that Nadav and Avihu were greater than Moshe and Aharon? Rather, the intent of Moshe is that they were able to be the catalysts to bring the Shechinah down to the Mishkan, whereas Moshe and Aharon were unable to do so. They were not able to increase the Yiras Shamayim of the public to the level that was needed in order for the Shechinah to come down to the Mishkan. This was only accomplished by the deaths of Nadav and Avihu. This is why Rashi says, “Now I see.” In other words, after Bnei Yisrael strengthened themselves due to their

deaths, and the Shechinah came down, now I see that they caused the Shechinah to come down; and in this aspect they are greater than me or you.

It is important to note that when Hashem punishes those who are exceptionally righteous, He does so in order to purify and sanctify them. This is as the Passuk states (*Tehilim 145:20*), “Hashem guards all who love Him.” He guards them to ascertain that they remain on their exalted level of service to Hashem by purifying them from any minor sins.

## V’Nikdash B’Chvodi

The death of Nadav and Avihu not only strengthened the Yiras Shamayim of Klal Yisrael. It also strengthened their Emunah. Even though Klal Yisrael was already on a very high level of Emunah by their seeing all of the miracles in Egypt, and while leaving Egypt, they still were not worthy to have the Shechinah rest in the Mishkan until after the death of Nadav and Avihu.

One might ask a question on everything we have just stated. Don’t the Pesukim say that the Shechinah came down to Klal Yisrael before the death of Nadav and Avihu? How can it be that their death caused the Shechinah to reside in the Mishkan? The answer is, that while the Shechinah did indeed come down beforehand, the Mishkan needed to be sanctified by Klal Yisrael in order that it should stay there. This additional sanctity, due to the strengthening of Klal Yisrael in Emunah and Yiras Shamayim, caused the Shechinah to stay in the Mishkan.

## Yirah Brings Kedushah

The fact that Yiras Shamayim brought added Kedushah to the Mishkan was natural. This is because Yiras Shamayim leads to Kedushah. A person becomes holy through learning Torah. However, the Passuk (*Tehilim 111:10*) states, “The beginning of wisdom is Yiras Hashem.” One must first have Yiras Shamayim in order to acquire true wisdom, which is Torah. A person must have at least a fear of punishment, and preferably a fear of Hashem’s awesomeness, before he starts to acquire Torah.

The Nefesh Ha’Chaim (4:7) writes, it is appropriate that before a person starts to learn, to think about Hashem with a pure heart and Yiras Shamayim. He should want to purify himself from sin and repent. Even during learning, the Nefesh Ha’Chaim says that one is allowed to stop for a brief moment, in order to have thoughts of Yiras Shamayim.

We see from here that a person needs Yiras Shamayim and repentance, in order to succeed in Torah learning. This is as the Mishnah in Avos (3:17) states, “If there is no fear (of

Heaven), there is no wisdom.” The Zohar states that Torah learning without Yiras Shamayim and mercy does not ascend to the Heavens. This teaches us that Torah learning without Yiras Shamayim is lacking.

## **Kadsheinu B’Mitzvosecha**

Performing Mitzvos results in a person becoming a holy person. This is why we ask Hashem in Shemonah Esreh on Shabbos and Yom Tov, “Kadsheinu b’Mitzvosecha” – “Sanctify us with Your Mitzvos.”

It is interesting to note that we also say, “v’Kidashtanu b’Mitzvosecha” – “and You have sanctified us with Your Mitzvos.” This is said in the past tense, as the very commandment to perform the Mitzvos gives us additional holiness, even before we perform the Mitzvah. A person who is commanded to perform more Mitzvos than others is holier than those other people. We therefore say this in the past tense as thanks for being commanded, and as a request for the future that we should indeed become holier by fulfilling all of the Mitzvos.

Why are we making this request? Isn’t it dependent upon us to choose whether or not we fulfill the Mitzvos? The answer is that we are asking Hashem to help us have proper intent when we fulfill the Mitzvos, as opposed to being a person who simply does Mitzvos out of rote.

This is as the Mishnah Berurah (*ch. 5*) quotes the Sefer Chassidim, who says that a person should not say Berachos without thinking about what he is saying. The prophet Yeshayahu explicitly told Bnei Yisrael that Hashem is very upset with Klal Yisrael when they Daven or say Berachos out of habit, without thinking about why they are saying these words, and what their intent should be. This is deemed “Mitzvos Anashim Melumadah” – “doing Mitzvos out of habit.” If a person says a Berachah without thinking at all about what he is saying, and without feeling gratitude towards Hashem, it is a very serious sin.

The Mishnah Berurah (*ibid*) also cites from the Sefer Chassidim that when we say Berachos on food or Mitzvos, we should have in mind that Hashem has performed a tremendous Chessed for us by giving us this food and commanding us in this Mitzvah.

While this is not always easy to fulfill, one should certainly try to think before he makes a Berachah why he is making the Berachah, and to Whom he is reciting the Berachah.

## **B’Chol Derachecha Da’aihu**

Every action that a person does should be with intent that he is doing so for the sake of Heaven. This is as the Passuk states, “B’Chol Derachecha Da’aihu” – “Know Him in all of your ways.” Similarly, the Mishnah in Avos (2:12) states, “And all of your actions should be done for the sake of Heaven.”

When a person eats, he should eat in order to have the strength and ability to serve Hashem. This is as the Rambam (*Hilchos De’os 3:3*) states, that not only our Mitzvos should be for the sake of Heaven, but also taking care of our physical needs should be done for the sake of Heaven. When a person goes to sleep, he should intend that his sleep should give him the strength to serve Hashem the next day. Having these intentions when we perform physical activities causes our physical activities to become spiritual activities. In essence, they transform actions such as eating and sleeping into Mitzvos.

Sometimes, it is even a Mitzvah not to perform a Mitzvah now, in order that one will be able to better serve Hashem later. It is well known that the Chafetz Chaim used to turn the lights off in the Beis Medrash when it was late at night, in order that everyone would be able to sleep and learn better the next day. This is despite the fact that people would have kept learning. Since their learning would have been at the expense of their learning the next day, it was preferable that they go to sleep.

When one refrains from learning, because he knows he will not be able to learn well tomorrow if he pushes himself tonight, this too is a Mitzvah.

The Gemara in Yoma (71a) states that if a person wants to pour libations onto the altar of the Beis Ha’Mikdash (which we cannot literally do today as we do not have a Beis Ha’Mikdash), he should give wine to Torah scholars. The reason for this is because Torah scholars eat and drink for the sake of Heaven. When they drink this wine, it is as if the person giving them the wine is offering a sacrifice. This is as the Mesilas Yesharim (*ch. 1*) writes that when a righteous person uses things in this world for the sake of Heaven, “he elevates himself, and the whole world with him.” This is the meaning of the stones that fought to be under the head of Yaakov Avinu. The world is made to serve a great Tzaddik, and is elevated by doing so. Therefore, each stone wanted to help Yaakov Avinu have a place to rest his head. Similarly, when a righteous person eats or drinks, the food and drink is sanctified through this action.

A person should not sleep because he enjoys sleeping, or eat because he enjoys the taste of the food. Rather, he should do so in order that he will have strength to serve Hashem. However, if a person needs to eat good food in order that he

will have the proper mindset to serve Hashem out of happiness, this is permitted. This is similar to the Mitzvah of Simchas Yom Tov, when we eat meat and drink wine in order to be in a happy state, and properly appreciate the Yom Tov that Hashem has given us. In contrast, if a person is unhappy, it is harder for him to serve Hashem.

The way to perfect our Middos and Torah observance is through a steady Mussar Seder. Many people have told me that they live a much happier life now that they have a Mussar Seder.

This should be a priority in everyone's life. Everyone must try to come close to Hashem, and love Him. Whenever a person learns Torah, he is increasing his level of sanctity and his love of Hashem. May we all merit Siyata Dishmaya!



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