

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

It should have been a day of joy. The Israelites had completed the mishkan, the sanctuary. For seven days Moses had made preparations for its consecration. (As described in Exodus 40.) Now on the eighth day -- the first of Nisan, (see Ex. 40:2) one year to the day since the Israelites had received their first command two weeks prior to the exodus -- the service of the sanctuary was about to begin. The sages say that it was in heaven the most joyous day since creation. (Megillah 10b)

But tragedy struck. The two elder sons of Aaron "offered a strange fire, that had not been commanded" (Lev. 10:1) and the fire from heaven that should have consumed the sacrifices consumed them as well. They died. Aaron's joy turned to mourning. Vayidom Aharon, "And Aaron was silent (10:3). The man who had been Moses' spokesman could not longer speak. Words turned to ash in his mouth.

There is much in this episode that is hard to understand, much that has to do with the concept of holiness and the powerful energies it released that, like nuclear power today, could be deadly dangerous if not properly used. But there is also a more human story about two approaches to leadership that still resonates with us today.

First there is the story about Aaron. We read about how Moses told him to begin his role as high priest. "Moses [then] said to Aaron, 'Approach the altar, and prepare your sin offering and burnt offering, thus atoning for you and the people. Then prepare the people's offering to atone for them, as G-d has commanded'" (Lev. 9:7).

The sages sensed a nuance in the words, "Approach the altar," as if Aaron was standing at a distance from it, reluctant to come near. They said: "Initially Aaron was ashamed to come close. Moses said to him, 'Do not be ashamed. This is what you have been chosen to do.'" (Rashi to Lev. 9:7, quoting Sifra)

Why was Aaron ashamed? Tradition gave two explanations, both brought by Nahmanides in his commentary to the Torah. The first is that Aaron was simply overwhelmed by trepidation at coming so close to the Divine presence. The rabbis likened it to the bride of a king, nervous at entering the bridal chamber for the first time.

The second is that Aaron, seeing the "horns" of the altar, was reminded of the Golden Calf, his great sin. How could he, who had played a key role in that terrible event, now take on the role of atoning for the people's sins? That surely demanded an innocence he no longer had. Moses had to remind him that it was precisely to atone for sins that the altar had been made, and the fact that he had been chosen by G-d to be high priest was an unequivocal sign that he had been forgiven.

There is perhaps a third explanation, albeit less spiritual. Until now Aaron had been in all respects second to Moses. Yes, he had been at his side throughout, helping him speak and lead. But there is vast psychological difference between being second-in -- command, and being a leader in your own right. We probably all know of examples of people who quite readily serve in an assisting capacity but who are terrified at the prospect of leading on their own.

Whichever explanation is true -- and perhaps they all are -- Aaron was reticent at taking on his new role, and Moses had to give him confidence. "This is what you have been chosen for."

The other story is the tragic one, of Aaron's two sons, Nadav and Avihu, who "offered a strange fire, that had not been commanded." The sages offered several readings of this episode, all based on close reading of the several places in the Torah where their death is referred to. Some said they had been drinking alcohol. (Vayikra Rabbah 12:1; Ramban to Lev. 10:9) Others said that they were arrogant, holding themselves up above the community. This was the reason they had never married. (Vayikra Rabbah 20:10)

Some say that they were guilty of giving a halakhic ruling about the use of man-made fire, instead of asking their teacher Moses whether it was permitted. (Eruvin 63a) Others say they were restless in the presence of Moses and Aaron. They said, when will these two old men die and we can lead the congregation? (Sanhedrin 52a)



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However we read the episode, it seems clear that they were all too eager to exercise leadership. Carried away by their enthusiasm to play a part in the inauguration, they did something they had not been commanded to do. After all, had Moses not done something entirely on his own initiative, namely breaking the tablets when he came down the mountain and saw the golden calf? If he could act spontaneously, why not they?

They forgot the difference between a priest and a prophet. A prophet lives and acts in time -- in this moment that is unlike any other. A priest acts and lives in eternity, by following a set of rules that never change. Everything about "the holy," the realm of the priest, is precisely scripted in advance. The holy is the place where G-d, not man, decides.

Nadav and Avihu failed fully to understand that there are different kinds of leadership and they are not interchangeable. What is appropriate to one may be radically inappropriate to another. A judge is not a politician. A king is not a prime minister. A religious leader is not a celebrity seeking popularity. Confuse these roles and not only will you fail. You will also damage the very office you were chosen to hold.

The real contrast here, though, is the difference between Aaron and his two sons. They were, it seems, opposites. Aaron was over-cautious and had to be persuaded by Moses even to begin. Nadav and Avihu were not cautious enough. So keen were they to put their own stamp on the role of priesthood that their impetuosity was their downfall.

These are, perennially, the two challenges leaders must overcome. The first is the reluctance to lead. Why me? Why should I get involved? Why should I undertake the responsibility and all that comes with it -- the stress, the hard work, and the criticisms leaders always have to face? Besides which, there are other people better qualified and more suited than I am.

Even the greatest were reluctant to lead. Moses at the burning bush found reason after reason to show that he was not the man for the job. Isaiah and Jeremiah both felt inadequate. Summoned to lead, Jonah ran away. The challenge really is daunting. But when you feel as if you are being called to a task, if you

know that the mission is necessary and important, then there is nothing you can do but say, Hineni, "Here I am." In the words of a famous book title, you have to "feel the fear and do it anyway." (Susan Jeffers, *Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway*, Ballantine Books, 2006.)

The other challenge is the opposite. There are some people who simply see themselves as leaders. They are convinced that they can do it better. We recall the famous remark of Israel's first president, Chaim Weizmann, that he was head of a nation of a million presidents.

From a distance it seems so easy. Isn't it obvious that the leader should do X, not Y? Homo sapiens contains many back seat drivers who know better than those whose hands are on the steering wheel. Put them in a position of leadership and they can do great damage. Never having sat in the driver's seat, they have no idea of how many considerations have to be taken into account, how many voices of opposition have to be overcome, how difficult it is at one and the same time to cope with the pressures of events while not losing sight of long term ideals and objectives. The late John F Kennedy said that the worst shock on being elected president was that "when we got to the White House we discovered that things were as bad as we said they were." Nothing prepares you for the pressures of leadership when the stakes are high.

Overenthusiastic, overconfident leaders can do great harm. Before they became leaders they understood events through their own perspective. What they did not understand is that leadership involves relating to many perspectives, many interest groups and points of view. That does not mean that you try to satisfy everyone. Those who do so end up satisfying no one. But you have to consult and persuade. Sometimes you need to honour precedent and the traditions of a particular institution. You have to know exactly when to behave as your predecessors did, and when not to. These call for considered judgement, not wild enthusiasm in the heat of the moment.

Nadav and Avihu were surely great people. The trouble was that they believed they were great people. They were not like their father Aaron who had to be persuaded to come close to the altar because of his sense of inadequacy. The one thing Nadav and Avihu lacked was a sense of their own inadequacy. (The composer Berlioz once said of a young musician: "He knows everything. The one thing he lacks is inexperience.")

To do anything great we have to be aware of these two temptations. One is the fear of greatness: who am I? The other is being convinced of your greatness: who are they? I can do it better. We can do great things if (a) the task matters more than the person, (b) we are willing to do our best without thinking ourselves superior to others, and (c) we are willing to take advice, the thing Nadav and Avihu failed to do.

People do not become leaders because they are great. They become great because they are willing to serve as leaders. It does not matter that we think ourselves inadequate. So did Moses. So did Aaron. What matters is the willingness, when challenge calls, to say, Hineni, "Here I am." ©2014 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer, placed fire on it, and laid incense thereon, and offered strange fire which He had not commanded them. And there came forth fire from before G-d, and it devoured them, so that they died before G-d." [Lev. 10:1–2]

The Torah's ambivalence regarding Nadav and Avihu reflects the complexity – and even tension – built into the very nature of the religious experience. Love of G-d engenders the desire to constantly feel the presence of the divine, to strive to become ever closer to the omniscient and compassionate Creator; fear of G-d engenders an awesome inadequacy, a sense of human frailty and transience, before the mysterium tremendum of the omnipotent and eternal Ruler of the universe.

Love of G-d inspires the individual to overcome all barriers, to push aside all veils, in a human attempt to achieve divine fellowship; fear of G-d fortifies the fences separating us from the Almighty, inspires us to humbly serve the author of life and death from a distance – without getting burnt by the divine fire.

From this perspective, herein lies the primary distinction between the priest [kohen] and the prophet [navi]. The priest is first and foremost the guardian of traditional laws and customs, ceremonies and prayers, which express the way in which we serve our G-d; these rituals are precisely defined to their every detail, have been time-honored and century-sanctified to provide historical continuity, a participation in the eternity of a rhythmic cycle which was there before I was born and will be retained after I die.

Hence the priest receives his mandate from his father – from generation to generation – and wears special and precise clothing symbolizing the external form of divine service. These rituals provide structure, but rarely allow for spontaneity; they ensure continuity but leave little room for creativity. Undoubtedly, the sacred rite passed down from generation to generation serves as our bridge to eternity, a gateway to the divine; but it also erects a certain barrier, weaves a curtain of white parchment and black letters between the individual heart and mind and the Almighty G-d.

The prophet, however, wears no unique clothing and need not be born into a specific family. He attempts to push aside any curtain, break through whatever barriers in order to scale the heights and

achieve divine nearness. He feels G-d's fire as "a fire which burns within his bones." He is often impatient with the details of ritual, the means which often cause him to lose sight of the ends; for him, passion takes precedence over protocol, spontaneity over structure.

The Jewish religious experience insists on maintaining the sensitive dialectic between love and fear of G-d, between the prophetic and priestly personality in Divine service, despite and maybe even because of the necessary tension between them. You must cling to the Lord your G-d (d'vekut); but do not draw too near to the mountain of the divine revelation lest you die. Allow for religious creativity and relevance by seeking the wisdom of the judge of each generation, but retain precedent by "asking your parent and he will tell you, your grandparent and he will say to you."

The Oral Tradition understands the necessity of sometimes abrogating a traditional law when a specific necessity warrants it – "It is the time to do for G-d, nullify your Torah" (Ps. 119:126) – but such extreme action is rarely invoked, generally giving way to obedience and humility in divine service. Prophet without priest threatens continuity and can even lead to frenzied fanaticism; priest without prophet can produce ritual without relevance, form without fire. Love G-d – but don't lose

your sense of awe and reverence; rejoice in G-d, but not without a measure of trembling; strive to get close to the divine dwelling, but do not break through the door.

Nadav and Avihu were caught up in the religious ecstasy of the moment – and wanted to get even closer to G-d. Their motives may well have been suffused with Divine love – but strange fires can lead to alien fanaticism; passion can breed perversion. They brought a strange fire – and G-d could not accept it. With all the inherent grief and tragedy, this was a time when the Divine lesson had to be taught to all generations: sometimes "by those who are nearest to Me must I be sanctified" (10:3). ©2017 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

The Gemara (Tractate) in Pesachim (3a) quotes: "A person should not speak in a negative way, as we see the Torah itself" went out of its way to speak nicely regarding the animals entering the Ark, describing the non-kosher animals as specifically that -- non-kosher. It doesn't call them Tamei (Impure). The Torah "wastes" words in order to teach us the importance of speaking nicely. From this week's Parsha, Shemini, we have a problem with this Gemara. The Torah continually refers to non-kosher animals as Tamei (11:4 and others). What happened to speaking nicely?

R' Mordechai Kamenetzky answers that the

difference is that the story of the Ark is a narrative, which is when people should be careful to tell it over in a nice way, refraining from Lashon Hara (slander) or negativity of any sort. In our Parsha, however, the Torah describes the nitty-gritty laws of what one may eat. In our case, it's important to give a resounding "TAMEI!" when discussing these matters, as the consequences are much graver. It should be the same when dealing with children and others around us who may not know better. We speak softly in order to get them to understand history, reasons and customs of Judaism. However, as the metaphor of food may hint at, if they are in imminent danger of internalizing negative influences, it's time to fearlessly admonish them. When dealing with clear right and wrong, the Torah tells us that sometimes it's necessary to boldly speak where no one has spoken before. ©2014 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah itself records the reaction of Moshe to the tragic deaths of the sons of Aharon. Moshe tells his grieving brother that the Lord had informed him, "that I will sanctify My name through those who are nearest to Me." Therefore even though the harsh judgment against Aharon – the dramatic and unexpected deaths of his two elder sons, Nadav and Avihu – dominates the mood of the moment, there is a subtle message of consolation and explanation that Moshe offers to his brother.

And that perhaps is one of the reasons that Aharon remained silent in acceptance of the fate that befell him and his family. Aharon apparently realized that there was a higher purpose also involved in these events – the sanctification of G-d's name and a warning against tampering with the ritual services of the Tabernacle/Temple/Mishkan – and this realization motivated his silence.

It is very difficult for us ordinary mortals to appreciate the nature of this means of sanctification. We tremble at having to think of G-d's sanctification and the ennobling of G-d's name in the world when we are forced always to think of death and human tragedy. We much prefer to think of G-d's greatness in terms of charity, compassion, comfort and consolation.

Yet, as mortals who possess an eternal soul, we all realize that death and tragedy are all part of life – unavoidable parts of life that we all experience and must deal with. Thus Moshe's words to his brother regarding death and tragedy are really addressed to all of us as well. That is the reason they appear in the Torah, whose words are directed to all humans for all time.

Those who are closest to G-d in their physical lifetime are treated specially and uniquely by Heaven for good or for better. This is a partial insight into the

overall pattern of challenge and difficulty that is the leitmotif of Jewish history. The Jewish people are special and being special carries with it great burdens and responsibilities. Even small errors of judgment or weakness and deviation of behavior can carry with it grave and lasting consequences.

As such, all Jews should feel that every action and pattern of behavior that becomes part of their lives is scrutinized, judged and brings forth reaction from G-d and humans. Nothing that happens in G-d's world is ignored or even forgotten. We are held to high standards. We are tight-rope walkers and there is no real safety net stretched out beneath us.

We all realize that a hurt inflicted upon us by a family member or close friend pains us much more deeply than from a similar hurt suffered by us from a stranger or even an enemy. Those who are closest to us are the ones that can hurt us the most. And that also is part of the message that Moshe told his brother. Since we are so close to G-d, Heaven is more pained, so to speak, by our shortcomings, insults and deviations from His path of instruction for us.

So our relationship to G-d is one of particular favor but also one of great challenge and responsibility. Simply by realizing this do we enhance our own holiness and help sanctify G-d's name. ©2014 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Aaron the High Priest is told by G-d in this week's portion not to drink wine before officiating in the Tabernacle. (Leviticus 10:9) Rashi explains the prohibition to mean that the priest "[may not drink] wine to such an extent that it has an intoxicating effect." Indeed, an opinion in the Talmud maintains that one has violated this prohibition only by drinking intoxicating wine of at least a re'vi'it — approximately 4-6 fluid ounces. (Keritot 13b)

In such a state Rambam adds the priests could go astray by entertaining some improper thoughts or by becoming unclear and erring in a matter of law.

In moderation, however, drinking is permissible. In fact, wine plays a crucial role in virtually every rite de passage — i.e. circumcision, marriage ceremony. And, wine is used to usher in most important days of our calendar year — i.e. Shabbat, Yom Tov, etc.

Why is this so?

It can be suggested that wine is the symbol of joy. Therefore, in proper measure it is drunk on the happiest of occasions and on the happiest of days.

Also, using wine on holy occasions teaches that while wine can intoxicate, when imbibed in

moderate amounts and for lofty purposes it can sanctify. Hence, we drink wine during kiddush and kiddushin (the marriage ceremony). No coincidentally, both these terms come from the word kadosh, holy. What this teaches is that everything in the world, even that which has the potential to be destructive, can be used for the good.

The mystics add: Adam and Eve disobeyed G-d when they drank wine squeezed from grapes. Every Shabbat, and, for that matter, at other religious ceremonies, we drink wine as a way of fixing that mistake — simulating Eden, but an Eden without disobeying G-d.

Finally, wine can alter the senses. Thus, it is drunk when we go through important moments of transition, like when moving from the weekdays to Shabbat, or when experiencing a rites de passage.

Still, even as the Torah speaks openly about the holy potential of wine, it warns us of its deleterious effects. The fact that the Torah warns us about intoxication means that substance abuse, including alcoholism, is a very real Jewish problem. We have the responsibility to address it and reach out to embrace and show endless care and love for those afflicted with this terrible disease. ©2017 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA
SICHA OF HARAV MOSHEH LICHTENSTEIN

Adapted by Binyamin Fraenkel

Translated by Kaeren Fish

At the beginning of parashat Shemini we read: "And it came to pass on the eighth day, that Moshe called Aharon and his sons, and the elders of Israel, and he said to Aharon, Take yourself a young calf for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering, without blemish, and offer them before the Lord. And to Bnei Yisrael you shall speak, saying, Take a kid of the goats for a sin offering, and a calf and a lamb, both of the first year, without blemish, for a burnt offering; also a bullock and a ram for peace offerings, to sacrifice before the Lord, and meal offering mingled with oil, for today the Lord will appear to you.

"And they brought that which Moshe commanded before the Tent of Meeting, and all the congregation drew near and stood before the Lord. And Moshe said, This is the matter which the Lord commanded you to do, and the glory of the Lord shall appear to you. And Moshe said to Aharon, Draw near to the altar, and offer your sin offering, and your burnt offering, and make atonement for yourself and for the people, and offer the offering of the people, and make atonement for them, as the Lord commanded. So

Aharon drew near to the altar, and slaughtered the calf of the sin offering, which was for himself..." (Vayikra 9:1-8)

Why must Moshe command Aharon to "draw near to the altar" in order to offer his sin offering and burnt offering? Why is Aharon hesitating? Ramban offers two explanations.

One explanation is based on a midrash: "In Torat Kohanim (Shemini, Miluim 8) our Sages note this and offer a parable, comparing the situation to one of a mortal king who married a woman, and she was timid in his presence. Her sister came to her and said, My sister, Why did you enter into this [marriage]? Was it not that you might serve the king? Take courage and come and serve the king!

"Likewise Moshe said to Aharon, My brother, why were you chosen to be the Kohen Gadol? Was it not so that you would serve G-d? Take courage and come and perform your service." (Ramban, Vayikra 9:7-8)

This parable suggests that Aharon was hesitant to enter the Holy of holies. G-d was about to bring His Presence to rest amongst Am Yisrael -- "for today the Lord will appear to you!" This was going to be a wondrous and unforgettable event, but it contained an element that was frightening and threatening. The simple woman in the story who married the important, powerful king was fearful of entering and serving him lest she lose herself entirely in the power and majesty of his presence. A person might well fear losing his own essence and personality as part of the experience of G-d making His Presence felt in the world.

Moshe therefore commands Aharon, "Take courage!" He instructs him to direct himself towards G-d with inner peace and tranquility.

Aharon is prepared to perform the special service in the Kodesh Kodashim, but he is afraid to lose himself in this service; he is afraid that he will become wholly a "representative of G-d" (shluchoi derachmana). Moshe assures him that he will still also be a "representative of man" (shluchoi didan), an individual with free will and not just a servant of G-d.

When a person is faced with choices and decisions, he will sometimes feel resistance and doubts with regard to a certain direction or action -- not because of the nature of the action itself, but rather because of the social image or stereotype associated with it. For instance, a person who is considering becoming active in some sphere within his community might feel quite comfortable with the activity that he would be undertaking, but hesitate for fear of being viewed in a certain way.

Similarly, a young man who comes to study at yeshiva after high school is at the peak of his physical strength; his self-image might center around sports and the special unit in which he hopes to serve in the army, and he fears the change of image that yeshiva study

may entail. He does not want to find himself, sometime in the future, wearing a kapote and streimel and hunched over books all day. A person who decides to become an educator or rabbi may likewise dislike the idea that people will stand when he enters the room and will no longer share jokes with him. In these and other similar instances, it is important to separate one's hesitations and doubts concerning the action, its importance, and the chances of its success, from the fear that one's personality will somehow be forced into a different mold.

"My brother -- take courage!" Torah study itself is not frightening; it fills a person with joy and pleasure, and we must approach our study with inner peace and calm. Even after we have embarked on yeshiva study, we must maintain our warmth, our sense of humor, our smile. Yeshiva study must not diminish a person in any way; it must broaden his personality and his horizons, not narrow and restrict them. We might compare the entry into the world of yeshiva study to a person getting into a pool to swim: it makes no sense to remain outside the water and just dip his finger in, nor to fall in all at once without looking where he is going. He descends step by step, confidently, calmly, and without fear. That way the encounter with the environment flows from his free will and his desire to connect, with no fear of being swallowed up and obliterated.

The second explanation that Ramban offers is this: "But some say that Aharon perceived the altar in the form of an ox, and he was afraid of it. Moshe came to him and said, Aharon, my brother, do not be afraid; take courage and approach it. For this reason he said, 'Draw near to the altar...'

"And he drew near to the altar' -- with caution. The reason for this is that since Aharon was holy unto G-d, and his soul held no sin except for the golden calf, that sin was fixed in his thoughts, as it is written (Tehillim 51:5), 'And my sin is before me always.' It appeared to him that the form of the calf was holding back his atonement. For this reason [Moshe] told him, 'Take courage' -- so that he would not be so despondent, since G-d desired his actions."

Aharon, "holy unto G-d," who has never sinned except in the incident of the golden calf, sees the calf before him at all times. He approaches the altar to offer up the sacrifices -- and perceives the altar in the form of a calf, recalling his sin.

King David is conscious of his sin at all times -- "My sin is before me always" (and indeed the verses reveal completely different behavior on his part before and after his sin). Aharon experiences a similarly profound trauma concerning the golden calf, and the episode remains indelibly engraved upon his consciousness; it is "fixed in his thoughts."

There are various Hassidic teachings directing person to forget his past sins, put them out of his mind, and start every day as a new beginning. Moshe does

not take this approach, but at the same time he takes pains to prevent the opposite extreme: he exhorts Aharon not to dwell in his trauma, and leaves him room for renewal. If a person has sinned, he must make atonement through a significant inner process of repentance, confession, and a firm resolution for the future -- but under no circumstances should he allow the sin to define him or his personality.

There is a Hassidic saying: 'A Jew must never despair, and one must never despair of a Jew.' This message resounds in Ramban's commentary here. A Jew must never despair of his ability to effect repair and change, even though he is in need of repair and change. And we must never despair of a fellow Jew, believing that he is so deeply immersed in sin that he is incapable of change and repair.

Sin dare not paralyze a person, because this would be the greatest victory for the yetzer ha-ra. The Ramban goes on to explain that Aharon was struggling not with an inner psychological trauma, but with Satan himself: "Others explain that it was Satan himself who showed [the altar] to him thus, as they taught: [Moshe said,] 'Aharon, my brother, although G-d has agreed to grant atonement for your sin, you have to "place it in Satan's mouth," lest he cause you to stumble when you come to the Sanctuary...' -- in Torat Kohanim (Shemini, miluim 3)."

Satan seeks to cause a person to despair of his ability and his potential for repentance and repair; he seeks to "fix the sin in his thoughts." One overcomes Satan by daring to draw close to G-d despite one's doubts and fears. If a child violates his parents' values by committing some grave behavior, he may feel that the task of reconnecting and rebuilding is beyond his ability. But parents await a child's return, despite his past behavior. There is a price that must be paid for betrayal and sin, but severance is an even heavier price, and one that we dare not pay.

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Tziduk Hadin

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

On the day following the holiday of Pesach (Isru chag) we do not recite the prayer of Tachnun (in fact this applies to the entire month of Nissan). We also don't recite the Tziduk Hadin in memory of the deceased. However in the Encyclopedia Talmudit it is written that "Tziduk Hadin after the deceased is recited together but not in a eulogizing format". Thus there are two ways of reciting the "Tziduk Hadin"; either one person saying it and then everyone repeats it (which is not permitted) or when everyone recites it together which is permissible.

It would seem that as the generations passed, people were unaware of these two ways of reciting this prayer. Therefore in the Sefer Haigur and the Beit Yosef it states that "It is the custom to recite it while

alone and not in public". This is the reason we do not say the prayer of "Zidkatcha Tzedek" at Mincha on Shabbat during the entire month of Nissan for this is in essence the "Tziduk Hadin" for our teacher Moshe who died on Shabbat at Mincha time. Since reciting "Zidkatcha Tzedek" is in essence Tziduk Hadin, we refrain from saying it in public.

In our portion the two sons of Aharon died and the reaction of Aharon was silence (Vayidom Aharon). Perhaps the "Tziduk Hadin" was accomplished during that silence and perhaps the silence was generated because it was the month of Nissan. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

White Noise

It was the last day of the Mishkan's inauguration. The joy was immeasurable, somewhat akin to the ribbon-cutting ceremony of a cherished king's new palace—in this case, a shrine to the glory of the King of kings and to the splendor of His reign. But in a tragic anticlimactic sequence, the celebration went terribly wrong. The children of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, entered into the realm of the outer limits, the Holy of Holies, the Kodesh HaKedoshim. They offered incense, something they assumed would surely bring joy to their Creator. But it was their own recipe.

Uncommanded, and uncalled for, something went terribly wrong. "A fire came forth from before Hashem and consumed them, and they died before Hashem" (Leviticus 10:1-2). It's hard for us, here, to fathom the pain. Remember that picture of a smiling schoolteacher and her fellow astronauts, waving in anticipation of another successful mission on America's galactic pride and joy, only to be vaporized into a mist of memories plunging toward the ocean in a disastrous fate? The beloved children of a beloved leader on a beloved day in a beloved service were gone in an instant, from glory to death. Yet their own father did not react in open agony, rather only through silence and acceptance. "And Aaron was silent" (ibid v. 3). That silence was not only commended, but extolled. As a reward for that stoic reaction of acceptance, the next command in the Torah is offered directly to Aharon without Moshe, who normally was the principal in receiving Heavenly directives.

Yet despite the praise meted to Aharon for his silence, the nation is commanded to react in a diametrically opposed manner. Moshe commands the nation, "the entire House of Israel shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited" (Leviticus 10:6). Aharon is praised for his silence, yet the nation is told to openly bewail the tragedy. What is the difference?

Back in the 1800's, the Magid of Trisk and Reb Mendel of Vorke were dear friends living next to each other. But, unfortunately Rav Mendel had to move to the other side of the forest, a distance of a half-a-day's

walk. Seeing his agony, Reb Mendel's sexton, Moishele, anxiously offered to make the three-hour trip each Friday to deliver correspondence.

And so it went. Every Friday morning, Moishele would set out across the forest and deliver Reb Mendel's letter to the Trisker Magid. He would wait for the Magid to read the letter and reply. Often it would take a while until the Magid returned from his study, eyes red from tears, his quivering hand holding the magnificently crafted response in a special envelope. Moishele would deliver the response to the Vorke Rebbe, and that letter, too, evoked the same emotional response: tears of joy and meaning filled the Rebbe's eyes.

After a year as a faithful envoy, Moishele's curiosity overtook him. "What possibly can those letters contain? Would it be so bad if I took a peek?" Therefore, one Friday he carefully opened the envelope—without disturbing the seal. He saw absolutely nothing. Just a blank paper rested between the walls of the envelope.

Shocked, Moshe carefully, placed the so-called letter back into the envelope and delivered it to the Trisker Maggid. Like clockwork, the Rebbe went into the study, and a half-hour later, bleary-eyed and shaken, he returned a letter to be delivered to his friend Reb Mendel of Vorke.

At this point, Moishele could not wait to leave the house and race back into the forest, where he would secretly bare the contents of the envelope, hoping to solve the mysterious exchange.

Again, blank paper. Moishele was mortified. "Have I been schlepping six hours each week with blank papers? What is this a game?" he wondered.

The entire Shabbos he could not contain his displeasure. Motzoai Shabbos, Reb Mendel called him in to his study. "You seem agitated, my dear shammash," he asked. "What seems to be the problem?"

"Problem?" he responded. "You know those letters I've been carrying. I admit it. I looked, this Friday. There was nothing in them! They were blank! What kind of game is this?"

Reb Mendel, did not flinch. "The Torah," he said, "has black letters on white parchment. The black contain the words we express. The white contains a message that is deeper than letters. Our feelings are often expressed through black letters. This week, we wrote with the white parchment. We expressed an emotion that transcends letters."

It is very important to realize one cannot equate the reaction required by a mourner to that of the responsive community. Not everyone is on the level to keep quiet. For those who can make their statement of faith and strength through silence, that is an amazing expression. For the rest of us, who are not on that level, we must express our sorrow and exclaim it in a human way as afforded by the dictates of Moshe. ©2001 Rabbi

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RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

Certain practices are just too vile and despicable for civilized people to endure, especially when it comes to food. The thought of chewing and swallowing the repulsive little vermin that live under rocks or in stagnant pools of water would make anyone gag. And yet, when the Torah in this week's portion delineates the organisms we are forbidden to eat there is a detailed mention of all sorts of reptiles, vermin and other loathsome creatures. Why does the Torah find it necessary to forbid something we would find repulsive in any case?

The Talmud addresses this problem and explains that Hashem wanted the Jewish people to accumulate additional reward. Therefore, He forbade them to eat vermin, so that they would be rewarded for their abstention. But the questions still remain: Why would we deserve to be rewarded for refraining to do something we find despicable and revolting and would never do anyway? Aren't we rewarded for overcoming our natural inclinations in order to comply with Hashem's will? In the case the prohibition against vermin, however, can we in all honesty claim that our compliance shows our high regard for Hashem's commandments or does it rather show our concern for our own fastidious nature?

The answer to these questions reveals one of the fundamental paradoxes of human nature. "Forbidden waters are sweet," proclaims the wise and ever insightful King Solomon in Proverbs. We seem to have a peculiar fascination with anything that is forbidden to us. And the more stringent the prohibition the greater the attraction. Are we ever more inclined to run our forefinger along a wall than when we see a sign declaring "Wet Paint"?

Why does the forbidden exert such a strong attraction to us? Because it triggers our inherent egotistical conviction that we are in control of our own lives, that we are the masters of our destiny. Therefore, we automatically view every prohibition as a challenge, an assault on our supposed independence and self-sufficiency, and we are drawn to violate the prohibition simply to prove to ourselves that we can do whatever we please, that no one else can tell us what to do.

In this light, we can well understand why we deserve to be rewarded for refraining from eating vermin. Certainly, we are not naturally predisposed to eating the slime of the earth. But when the Torah imposes a legal prohibition on these selfsame vermin they suddenly become strangely appealing. And when we resist this temptation generated by the commandment itself we are rewarded for our compliance. In this way, the Talmud tells us, Hashem rewarded us with additional merit simply by imposing a

prohibition on the most loathsome foods imaginable.

Two mothers brought their young sons to the seaside on a warm summer day. They placed the children in a sandbox and gave them pails and shovels. Then they walked a short distance away to sit and enjoy the balmy weather.

Before walking off, one of the mothers bent down to her child and said, "Remember, my precious little one, don't go near the waves. They're very dangerous. You might get hurt."

No sooner had she sat down, however, than her little boy was off to stick his toes into the surf. The mother ran to retrieve him. She brought him back to the sandbox and repeated her admonition, more sternly this time. Minutes later, the little boy was off to the water once again. During all of this commotion, the other child remained in the sandbox, completely focused on the castle he was building.

"I don't understand," the frustrated mother said to her friend. "You didn't say a word to your son, and yet he hasn't even looked at the water. But my son keeps running to the water even though I explained to him how dangerous it is."

Her friend smiled. "That's it exactly. You forbid your son from going to the water, so he has to prove himself by going. I didn't say anything to my son, so he couldn't care less. He is far more interested in the sand."

In our own lives, we can all recognize this tendency in ourselves, whether in issues as momentous as the challenges of Torah observance or as relatively minor as exceeding the speed limit. Somehow, we feel diminished when we subject ourselves to restrictions imposed upon us by others. But if we were truly honest with ourselves, we would realize that accepting the authority of the Torah does not diminish us in any way. On the contrary, it allows us to be directed by the Divine Wisdom rather than our own limited vision and rewards us with serenity and fulfillment that would otherwise be far beyond our reach. ©2011 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

