

Toras אשׁת אשׁת Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

It should have been the great day of celebration. The Tabernacle, Israel's first collective house of worship, was complete. All preparations had been made. For seven days, Moses had performed the inauguration. Now, the eighth day, the first of Nissan, had arrived. The Priests, led by Aaron, were ready to begin their service.

It was then that tragedy occurred. Two of Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, brought "strange fire, which [God] had not commanded them." Fire "came forth from the Lord" and they died. There then follow two scenes between Moses and Aaron. The first: Moses then said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord spoke of when He said, 'Among those who are near to Me I will show Myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honoured.'" Aaron remained silent. (Lev. 10:3)

Moses then commanded their bodies to be removed, and forbade Aaron and his remaining sons to engage in rituals of mourning. He gave them further instructions to prevent such tragedies from occurring in the future, and then proceeded to check whether the sacrifices of the day had been performed. He discovered that Aaron and his sons had burned the sin offering, instead of eating it as prescribed: When Moses inquired about the goat of the sin offering and found that it had been burned up, he was angry with Eleazar and Itamar, Aaron's remaining sons, and asked, "Why didn't you eat the sin offering in the Sanctuary area? It is most holy; it was given to you to take away the guilt of the community by making atonement for them before the Lord. Since its blood was not taken into the Holy Place, you should have eaten the goat in the Sanctuary area, as I commanded."

Aaron replied to Moses, "Today they sacrificed their sin offering and their burnt offering before the Lord, but such things as this have happened to me. Would the Lord have been pleased if I had eaten the sin offering today?" When Moses heard this, he approved. (Lev. 10:16 -- 20)

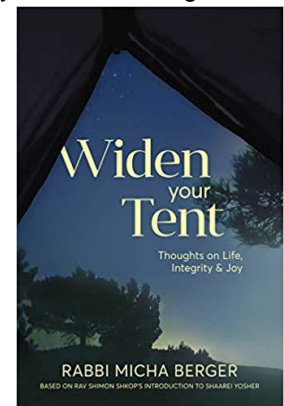
Without going into the details of these exchanges, their psychology is enthralling. Moses tries to comfort his brother, who has lost two of his sons. He

**Please keep in mind
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tells him that God has said, "Among those who are near to Me, I will show Myself holy." According to Rashi, he said, "Now I see that they [Nadav and Avihu] were greater than you and me." The holier the person, the more God demands of them.

It is as if Moses said to Aaron: "My brother, do not give up now. We have come so far. We have climbed so high. I know your heart is broken. So is mine. Did we not think -- you and I -- that our troubles were behind us, that after all we suffered in Egypt, and at the Red Sea, and in the battle against Amalek, and in the sin of the Golden Calf, we were finally safe and free? And now this has happened. Aaron, don't give up, don't lose faith, don't despair. Your children died not because they were evil but because they were holy. Though their act was wrong, their intentions were good. They merely tried too hard." But despite Moses' words of consolation, "Aaron remained silent," lost in a grief too deep for words.

In the second exchange, Moses is concerned with something else -- the community, whose sins should have been atoned for by the sin offering. It is as if he had said to Aaron: "My brother, I know you are in a state of grief. But you are not just a private person. You are also the High Priest. The people need you to perform your duties, whatever your inner feelings." Aaron replies: "Would the Lord have been pleased if I had eaten the sin offering today?" We can only guess at the precise import of these words. Perhaps they



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mean this: "I know that in general, a High Priest is forbidden to mourn as if he were an ordinary individual. That is the law, and I accept it. But had I acted on this inaugural day as if nothing had happened, as if my sons had not died, would this not seem to the people as if I were heartless, as if human life and death meant nothing, as if the service of God meant a renunciation of my humanity?" This time, Moses is silent. Aaron is right, and Moses knows it.

In this exchange between two brothers, a momentous courage is born: the courage of an Aaron who has the strength to grieve and not accept any easy consolation, and the courage of a Moses who has the strength to keep going in spite of grief. It is almost as if we are present at the birth of an emotional configuration that will characterise the Jewish people in centuries to come. Jews are a people who have had more than their share of suffering. Like Aaron, they did not lose their humanity. They did not allow their sense of grief to be dulled, deadened, desensitised. But neither did they lose their capacity to continue, to carry on, to hope. Like Moses, they never lost faith in God. But like Aaron, they never allowed that faith to anaesthetise their feelings, their human vulnerability.

That, it seems to me, is what happened to the Jewish people after the Holocaust. There were, and are, no words to silence the grief or end the tears. We may say -- as Moses said to Aaron -- that the victims were innocent, holy, that they died al kiddush Hashem, "in sanctification of God's name." Surely that is true. Yet nonetheless, "Aaron remained silent." When all the explanations and consolations have been given, grief remains, unassuaged. We would not be human were it otherwise. That, surely, is the message of the book of Job. Job's comforters were pious in their intentions, but God preferred Job's grief to their vindication of tragedy.

Yet, like Moses, the Jewish people found the strength to continue, to reaffirm hope in the face of despair, life in the presence of death. A mere three years after coming eye to eye with the Angel of Death, the Jewish people, by establishing the State of Israel, made the single most powerful affirmation in two thousand years that Am Yisrael Chai, the Jewish people lives.

Moses and Aaron were like the two

hemispheres of the Jewish brain: human emotion on the one hand, faith in God, the covenant, and the future on the other. Without the second, we would have lost our hope. Without the first, we would have lost our humanity. It is not easy to keep that balance, that tension. Yet it is essential. Faith does not render us invulnerable to tragedy but it gives us the strength to mourn and then, despite everything, to carry on. *Covenant and Conversation 5779 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2019 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 God, and it devoured them, so that they died before God." (Leviticus 10:1-2) The portion of Shemini begins with the great drama of the week-long consecration ceremony of the Sanctuary. The nation is exalted, the leadership is inspired – but suddenly joy is turned into tragedy when the two sons of Aaron the High Priest are consumed by a fire sent down by God. What caused such a hapless event? The biblical text seems to say that it was because "they offered a strange fire which [God] had not commanded." What possible sin could these two "princes" in Israel have committed to make them worthy of such punishment?

The expression "strange fire" is so ambiguous that the various commentaries offer a number of possibilities. Immediately after the deaths of Aaron's sons, the Torah issues a command forbidding Aaron and his sons to ever carry out their Sanctuary duties under the influence of any intoxicants. If a person cannot "...distinguish between the holy and the mundane, and between the unclean and the clean..." (Lev. 10:10) he doesn't belong in the Ohel Moed (Tent of Meeting). Thus it's not surprising that one midrash (Vayikra Raba 12:1) looks upon this injunction as a biblical hint that Nadav and Avihu were inebriated when they brought the incense offering, the intoxicant turning their incense offering into a "strange fire."

Another midrash explains that Nadav and Avihu so envied Aaron and Moses, that they couldn't wait for them to step down so that they could step up. This is the strange fire of jealousy which hadn't been commanded of them; they themselves initiated a sacrifice without asking permission of their elders, Moses and Aaron. They were too ambitious for their own good.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, my rebbe and mentor, has often taught that in order to grasp how the Sages wanted us to understand a given Torah portion,

we should always turn to the haftora (the portion from the Prophets) for that week, which often serves as a commentary in and of itself.

Three separate events take place in the haftora of this portion, (chapters six and seven in ii Samuel): Thirty-thousand of the nation's chosen join with King David on his journey to restore the previously conquered Holy Ark to Jerusalem, turning the occasion into a celebratory procession accompanied with all kinds of musical instruments. The ark is transported in an oxcart that belongs to the brothers, Uzzah and Ahio; when the oxen stumble, Uzzah reaches out to take hold of the ark. Right then and there, God strikes Uzzah dead.

Three months pass before David again attempts to bring back the ark, and when he arrives triumphant in the city of Zion, he dances with all of his might, upsetting his wife who chastises him: "How did the king of Israel get his honor today, who uncovered himself today in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows who shamelessly uncovers himself" (ii Samuel 6:21). The third incident records that David decides he wants to build a permanent dwelling for the ark of God rather than allowing it to rest in a curtained enclosure. At first the prophet Nathan is encouraging, but later in the night a voice tells him that although David's throne will be established to last forever, he personally will not build the Temple; his son Solomon will. In the account of the same event recorded elsewhere, the blood that David caused to flow in the various wars he fought prevents him from building a Temple which must be dedicated to peace (I Chronicles 22:8).

All three incidents point to the same theme: the emotional instinct of the individual has to take a backseat to the emotional desire to come close, too close, to the holy; the holy must be revered from a distance.

Uzzah certainly did not intend disrespect when he took hold of the ark; nevertheless, touching the holiest object in existence without permission was forbidden. Since Michal is the daughter of King Saul, and knows first-hand that a king's honor is not his own but is rather the nation's, she cannot applaud David's leaping and dancing in wild abandon – even if it be in religious ecstasy. As such, the monarch of Israel must always behave honorably and respectfully, fully in control of his actions.

And as to who will build the Holy Temple, King David himself must be ruled out because of all the spilled blood; his wars may have been necessary and even obligatory, but even the most just of wars brings in its wake excessive killing, often accidental killing of the innocent, emotional hatred and passionate zeal. What the haftora reflects back on is that performing a mitzvah for God which God didn't command – no matter how inspired, spiritually or ecstatically – invites a

disapproving, destructive blaze from heaven. Like Uzzah, Aaron's sons got too close to the sacred, took the sacred into their own hands. Ecstasy, especially in the service of God, can turn into a sacrilegious act of zealotry, of passionate pursuit of God's honor at the expense of human life and respect for others. Passionate religious fire in the name of God can turn into "self-righteous fanaticism" which can tragically lead to the desecration of the divine name, even to suicide bombers.

Nadav and Avihu are rare Jews, sons of Aaron, nephews of Moses, their lives dedicated to service in the Temple, privileged to be among the chosen few to have had a sapphire vision of God's glory back at the sealing of the covenant in the portion of Mishpatim. We cannot even begin to comprehend their spiritual heights. Nevertheless, they die tragically because they brought a passionate fire not commanded by God. When people on the level of Nadav and Avihu fail to distinguish between Divine will and human will, allowing their subjective desires to take over, they are expressing their own emotions but are not necessarily doing the will of the Divine. Confusing our will with God's will is truly playing with fire. If we limit ourselves to God's commands in the ritual realm we can be reasonably certain that we are serving God and not our own egos and subjective hatreds and passions. One dare not get too close to the divine fire, lest one get burnt by that very fire." ©2019 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

We are all aware that personal disappointments and tragedies are unavoidable events in the life span of human beings. No one departs from this world unscathed by difficulties. In the Torah reading of this week we are informed of the death of the two elder sons of Aaron. The Torah ascribes their deaths to the fact that they offered up a strange fire on the altar in the process of burning the holy incense.

The commentators to the Torah over the ages have searched for an understanding of what their sin was and how the punishment fit the crime. It would be no exaggeration to state that in spite of these valiant scholarly efforts, the entire incident is still shrouded in mystery and beyond ordinary rational understanding.

Because of this, the Torah itself, almost cryptically, accepts Aaron's reaction of silence as being a correct and appropriate reaction to this tragedy. One would therefore be led to believe that this tragic moment in the life of Aaron and his family marked the end of his public career and his service to the Jewish people. It would apparently be understandable to many if Aaron had simply retired and left the priesthood for others to service and administer. I think that this is part of the message why the Torah emphasizes that all of

this took place on the eighth day. The eighth day is always representative of continuity in Jewish life. It is the day of circumcision and it is the day when the seven-day period of mourning is over. The eighth day looks to the future and is always seen as a day of recovery and rejuvenation.

The history of the Jewish people, just as is true in the lives of individuals, has many instances of tragedy and disappointment. Yet the overall impression that Jewish history should leave with those who study it, is the great resilience that our story represents. Our story is one of the eighth day and not merely of the seven days of mourning and sadness.

Aaron and his descendants are remembered and revered until today for their continual blessings and service to the Jewish people, both in Temple times and thereafter. Rising from his personal tragedy, Aaron becomes the most beloved of Jewish leaders and the symbol of harmony, tolerance and true piety for all time.

The rabbis of the Mishnah encouraged us all to become students and disciples of Aaron and to emulate his ways and attitudes. We are to appreciate his silence in reaction to tragedy and to be inspired by his resilience and continuity in public service in spite of his personal loss and grief. This is a lesson that is true for us not only on a personal scale but on a national one as well.

The last century has been a tragic one for the Jewish people. But it has proven to be a time of great resilience and untold accomplishment. We should always remember that no matter what our situation may be today we will always attempt to live and be successful on the eighth day. ©2019 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

The Torah in this week's Parsha mandates that for animals to be kosher they must possess two characteristics--cloven hooves and chew the cud. (Leviticus 11:3) In contemporary times there is much ado about the impact of food on physical health. My doctors keep telling me for example, to keep the fat and cholesterol down. Is it possible that food could similarly impact on one's spiritual well-being? This in fact is the position of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in his explanation of kashrut (the dietary laws).

The characteristics of kosher animals point to their being more passive in nature. In Hirsch's words: "If we look at the signs for clean animals they appear plant-like. As they chew the cud, the food consumed passes through two stomachs, is driven up the gullet again and chewed for the second time. Thus, these

animals spend a great deal of time in the absorption of food. The cloven hooves of the permitted animals also seem to have been created more for the mere purpose of standing than for being used as weapons or tools."

The same is true concerning fish. To be kosher, fish must have fins and scales. (Leviticus 11:9) Not coincidentally, fish that have these characteristics are by and large more peaceful in nature. The more aggressive fish fall into the category of the prohibited. Moreover, birds of prey are by and large enjoined. The rule holds fast. The more aggressive animals and fowl are prohibited. The more passive are permitted.

Of course, not everyone who consumes kosher food leads lives of inner peace. There are troubled people who eat kosher, just as there are fine people who do not eat kosher. Nonetheless, the ritual of kashrut may help us become more conscious of our responsibilities to live ethical lives.

The balance between outer action and inner feelings is especially discernible in the laws of forbidden and permitted animals. Note, that chewing the cud is an internal characteristic as it deals with the inner digestive system. In contrast, cloven hooves are an external characteristic. One merely has to look at an animal's foot to detect whether this criteria has been met. Perhaps, just perhaps this teaches that to be kosher one's behavior must not only be correct, but inwardly pure.

Whether these rationales are satisfactory or not, the prohibited foods teach us discipline. They remind us that in the end, God is the arbiter of right and wrong. Notwithstanding, the kashrut laws carry powerful ethical lessons--lessons that can help ennoble and sanctify our lives. ©2019 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

RABBI DAVID LEVINE

Don't Mourn

Parashat Shemini contains the tragic story of Nadav and Avihu, the two oldest sons of Aharon HaKohein. The Kohanim had finished the last of the seven days of the inauguration for their service in the Mishkan. They were invested with the responsibilities of the sacrifices and were beginning to actively participate in this responsibility. Aharon and his four sons had been sanctified with the oil that was poured on them as had been done to anoint the vessels of the Mishkan. After the sacrifices had been brought, Nadav and Avihu decided on their own to bring an incense-offering in their own firepan to Hashem. This was not an authorized service but was brought out of their desire to serve Hashem in an even greater fashion. They failed to consult either their father or Moshe and brought the incense without permission. Hashem sent a fire and their souls were consumed.

They were taken from the place where they died and were buried.

The Torah tells us, "Moshe said to Aharon and Elazar and Itamar his remaining sons, 'do not leave your heads unshorn and do not rend your garments that you do not die and He (Hashem) become wrathful with the entire assembly, and your brothers, the entire House of Yisrael will cry for the conflagration that Hashem ignited. Do not go out from the opening of the Tent of Meeting lest you die, for the oil of the Hashem's anointment is upon you', and they carried out Moshe's bidding." This simple instruction is difficult to understand based on other laws which seem to contradict it.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that Aharon and his sons had never seen the offering of incense in the Ohel Mo'eid (Tent of Meeting) during the days of the inauguration. At that time, only Moshe was permitted into the Ohel Mo'eid as he was acting as the Kohein Gadol until the conclusion of their investiture. The question that can then be asked is why the pasuk uses the term, "and from the opening of the Tent of Meeting you shall not go." This would seem to prevent the Kohanim from becoming contaminated by those outside of the Mishkan grounds. One could also inquire as to who burned the incense on the seventh day in the afternoon if the Kohanim did not yet have permission to enter the Ohel Mo'eid to bring the incense or to light the Menorah. Sorotzkin answers that the commandment not to leave the entrance of the Ohel Mo'eid had two separate applications. The pasuk that forbid the Kohanim from leaving the entrance to the Ohel Mo'eid was to prevent them from becoming contaminated among the public, but this did not prevent them from entering the Ohel Mo'eid in order to perform a service to Hashem. The Kohanim were permitted to enter and bring the "proper" incense and they could also light the Menorah. Nadav and Avihu had permission to enter but they entered at a time when they were not permitted because the incense that they brought was not part of the service that had been instituted.

The Ramban deals with another issue in these p'sukim which is also discussed by HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch. We are told, "Moshe said to Aharon and Elazar and Itamar his sons, 'do not leave your heads unshorn and do not rend your garments that you do not die.'" We learn later in Parashat Emor that this particular law only applies to the Kohein Gadol and not to the regular Kohein who is called a Kohein Hediot. The clothes that were worn by the Kohein Gadol were different than the clothes worn by the Kohein Hediot. There were many different shifts of Kohanim who would work for part of the year and be off-duty at other times. They only wore the priestly garments when they served their shift. Only the Kohein Gadol served perpetually and was not relieved from his duties even for the death of his parents. The Ramban questions why Aharon's

other two sons were not permitted the regular forms of mourning since they were not the Kohein Gadol. He explains that the statement, "for the oil of the Hashem's anointment is upon you" was a Rabbinic enactment and not a Torah mitzvah but simply Scriptural support for the Rabbinic enactment. The sons of Aharon were not actually forbidden to mourn and were not liable to the death penalty if they chose to do so.

Hirsch and the Ramban offer an interesting reason for the special treatment of Aharon's sons in this situation. On the final day of the Miluim, the inauguration, the Kohein Gadol and his sons were anointed with the oil of anointing. This would not be true for future generations of Kohanim. The fact that Aharon's sons were anointed with the oil made them unique. They were closer to Aharon than to a Kohein Hediot of future generations. They followed the same rules for mourning as did the Kohein Gadol. Since he was not able to mourn for his relatives, the two remaining sons of Aharon were also forbidden to show the outward signs of mourning. Rav Hirsch places these sons on the same level as the Kohein Gadol.

Hirsch explains that the Kohein Gadol represents the ideal man to Hashem. Hirsch understands that for him, "the idea of Hashem and the idea of the Nation is to drive into the background the feelings of his own wounded self. For before Hashem, there is no such thing as Death, and the one who has been called away has only changed the scene of his existence; the Nation too knows no Death, (ein tzibur meit, a community cannot die)." That is why the Kohein Gadol has the words Kodesh LaHashem, Holy unto Hashem, for it represents the Immortal Soul.

For us we must focus on the idea of service to Hashem and obligation to family. There is a fine line that Hashem has drawn between the responsibilities to both. There is no question that we owe our allegiance to Hashem and to our families. The obligations to our family are often recognized most through death. Many times we forget to demonstrate that loyalty when there is no crisis. We fail to communicate regularly, fail to attend simchas, and generally go about our own lives without a strong connection to those who can help us most with their words of comfort, their ideas, and simply their love. The same can be said by many in our relationship with Hashem. We may not feel close to Him except at a time of crisis. We do not communicate with the One Who can give us the most comfort, the best advice, and the most meaningful love. We all need to work more on our relationship with our families and with Hashem. May we grow to be more aware of both of these obligations. © 2019 Rabbi D. Levine

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 Mendele'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 shammass," 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. ©2019 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"**A**nd they (Nadav and Avihu) brought a foreign fire before G-d" (Vayikra 10:1). "And a fire went out from before G-d and consumed them, and they died before G-d (10:2). Most (e.g. Toras Kohanim 3:1:22, see Rabbeinu Bachye) are of the opinion that Nadav and Avihu brought this "strange fire" into the inner sanctum (the Kodesh HaKadashim, where the Ark was). Raavad suggests that the basis for saying that they went into the inner sanctum (as opposed to bringing the incense on the golden altar in the outer sanctum, where incense is usually brought) is that they went "before G-d," a term also used to describe the place G-d's fire came from, i.e. the inner sanctum (see Toras Kohanim 3:1:34). Since both are

described as “before G-d,” they must both be the same place. Raavad then asks how the fire could be described as “going out,” meaning going out from the inner sanctum, if Nadav and Avihu were inside. To answer this, he suggests that they weren’t consumed by the fire until after they had left the inner sanctum (perhaps to avoid having to remove their bodies from the inner sanctum). Rav Yitzchok Sorotzkin, sh'lita, (Rinas Yitzchok I) asks how Raavad could say that they weren’t consumed until after they left the inner sanctum if they also died “before G-d,” which Raavad says refers to the inner sanctum. (Rav Sorotzkin leaves this question unanswered.)

Before discussing any of the ancillary issues related to this question, a discussion regarding what the term “before G-d” refers to is warranted. G-d had commanded that a jar of manna (the daily bread that fell from heaven in the desert) be stored “before G-d” (Sh’mos 16:32-33), and it was put “before the testimony,” i.e. the Ark in the inner sanctum (16:34, see Rashi). Similarly, the staff collected from all the Tribal Chiefs after Korach’s rebellion was put “before G-d” (Bamidbar 17:22), which was “before the testimony” in the inner sanctum (see 17:19 and 17:24). However, the overwhelming majority of the time a place is described as “before G-d” it cannot mean “in the inner sanctum.” Numerous times it is used in conjunction with one of the vessels in the outer sanctum (the “Kodesh,” or “Ohel Mo’ed”), such as where the Menorah (Sh’mos 27:21 and 40:25, Vayikra 24:3-4), Shulchan (Sh’mos 40:23 and Vayikra 24:6/8) and Mizbayach HaK’tores (Sh’mos 30:8, Vayikra 4:7, 4:18 and 16:18) were. It is also used to describe the place where Aharon wears his Priestly garments (Sh’mos 28:12, 28:29-30, 28:35 and 28:38), garments he cannot wear in the inner sanctum. The context of most instances of the words “before G-d” indicates that it is referring to the courtyard area, which corresponds to the “Azara” in the Temple (see Rashi on Vayikra 1:5), including several instances (e.g. Sh’mos 29:11 and 29:42, Vayikra 1:3, 4:4, 14:11, 14:23, 15:14 and 16:7) where it explicitly says that it is by the “door of the Tent of Meeting,” i.e. in the courtyard. There are even some instances (e.g. D’varim 14:23/26) where “before G-d” refers to an area beyond the confines of the Temple (but inside the city), thereby preventing the term from being limited to the Temple grounds (D’varim 27:7 uses it to refer to the altar built on Mt. Eival). It would therefore be difficult to say that by using the term “before G-d” the Torah must be telling us that Nadav and Avihu sinned inside the inner sanctum, or that they died there. Nor could it automatically be assumed that all three things (where Nadav and Avihu sinned, where the fire came from, and where they died) occurred in the same place just because the same term (“before G-d”) is used for all of them.

Most assume that Nadav and Avihu brought

their “foreign fire” into the inner sanctum based on their deaths being mentioned as an introduction to the procedure necessary before Aharon is allowed to go in (see Rashi on Vayikra 16:2). If that was where they were when they sinned, it would be difficult to say that the fire that consumed them originated outside the inner sanctum and then “went out” by going “in.” (Nor could it be considered “going out” if both the fire and its targets were in the same area outside the inner sanctum.) Since G-d’s presence is most highly concentrated (as it were) within the inner sanctum, this is the divine fire’s most likely point of origin. Raavad, on the other hand, attributes the assumption that Nadav and Avihu sinned in the same place that the fire “went out” from to the same term being used for both. However, it is inconceivable that Raavad didn’t know that the term “before G-d” is used to describe other parts of the Temple complex, and, as Rav Sorotzkin pointed out, by suggesting that Nadav and Avihu were consumed after they left the inner sanctum despite that spot also being referred to as “before G-d,” Raavad must also agree that being used multiple times in the same narrative (and in the same verse) does not mean that it has to refer to the same exact location. Perhaps Raavad suggested that using the same term meant it was the same location because of the way they were used, not because it was the same term. Did the fire come “from Before G-d” (with a capital “B” because it is a proper name for a specific location) or “from before G-d” (with a lower case “b” because it is a description of an area near the divine presence)? Being that the words “before G-d” can refer to a number of different locations, it must be a lower case “b.” Or at least it usually is. When coupled with the word “from” (by having the letter “mem” as a prefix), though, the implication is that something is moving “from” a known, identified, area, in this case “from” the area previously identified as “before G-d.” Therefore, even though the term “before G-d” later in the same verse (see also Bamidbar 3:4) can mean outside the inner sanctum, the term “from before G-d” implies from the area that was previously identified as “before G-d.” And since the area the divine fire originated from was the inner sanctum, the previously mentioned “before G-d” must have been referring to the inner sanctum as well.

This suggestion was made to try to explain Raavad’s approach, which was meant to answer the question he posed regarding the fire being described as “going out” despite its intended targets, Nadav and Avihu, being “in” the same location as the fire. However, there is another way to address this issue without forcing Nadav and Avihu to leave the inner sanctum before they are consumed.

The expression “and a fire went out from before G-d” appears twice in our narrative, once to describe the fire that consumed the offerings that were on the altar (Vayikra 9:24) and once to describe the fire that

consumed Nadav and Avihu (10:2). When Toras Kohanim tells us that Nadav and Avihu went into the inner sanctum, it explains what their motivation was: "Since the sons of Aharon saw that all the offerings had been brought, and all the deeds (that had been commanded) had been done, and [yet] the divine presence did not descend for Israel, Nadav said to Avihu, 'does anyone cook a dish without fire?' Immediately they took a foreign fire and entered into the inner sanctum." They weren't reacting to the already-sent divine fire, but trying to bring it about. Why, then, is the fire that consumed the offerings described before the fire that Nadav and Avihu brought into the inner sanctum?

It would seem that the two identical verses of "and a fire went out from before G-d" are not describing two different fires that "went out" at two different times. Rather, as Rashbam suggests (although not to answer the issues being discussed here), there was but one "fire that went out from before G-d." It originated in the inner sanctum and consumed Nadav and Avihu on its way out to consume the offerings that were on the altar. [It should be noted that Rashbam is one of the few commentators with the opinion that Nadav and Avihu were not in the inner sanctum; he says the fire consumed them while they were in the outer sanctum as it traveled from the inner sanctum to the courtyard. I am applying this to the opinion that they were in the inner sanctum, with the fire originating between the "K'ruvim" and consuming them while they were in the inner sanctum between the Ark and the Curtain on its way out.] Since it was the very same fire that consumed Nadav and Avihu and (then) the offerings, first the Torah finishes the narrative it had begun regarding the offerings (which ended with the divine fire coming out of the sanctuary and consuming them) before starting on the concurrent narrative of the very same fire consuming Nadav and Avihu. And since the fire did "go out" of the inner sanctum (and the outer sanctum for that matter) in order to consume the offerings, there is no issue with it being described as "going out" when it's repeated in the Nadav and Avihu narrative, even though Nadav and Avihu never left the inner sanctum. ©2014 Rabbi D. Kramer

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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 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. ©2016 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

