

“And the sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, took... and they brought before Hashem an alien fire that He had not commanded them.” (10:2,3)

The catastrophe which befell Nadav and Avihu is one of the great tragedies of the *Torah*. It begs for explanation. Each in his own way, the various commentators offer an orientation for understanding their sin and its ensuing punishment. *Horav S.R. Hirsch, z.l.*, suggests that they had acted on impulse, in an outburst of enthusiasm. This impassioned act of pride in approaching the altar proved fatal to them.

Joyful emotions, regardless of their sincerity, may not be used to serve as a pretext to break the discipline established by law. Alteration of Hashem's law cannot be tolerated, especially on the part of a *Kohen*. We are not to presume to judge Hashem's *mitzvos* and independently determine the best manner for performing them. To do so would be to disregard Hashem's own guidance as prescribed by His *Torah*. Our duty is to strive to understand His mandate and to apply all of our strength and enthusiasm in order to observe His dictates.

The sons of Aharon were to manifest the epitome of discipline. Had their sin been committed by a less significant person, it would have been perceived as less offensive. One of the hallmarks of a leader is self-discipline and obedience to *Torah* law. When leaders deviate, their sin is much more pronounced.

In a similar vein, the *Chidushei Ha'Rim* shows that the most noble intentions cannot mitigate an act not dictated by Divine command. Although the sons of Aharon thought they were performing a *mitzvah*, it was in fact not commanded by Hashem- o,ut vum tk rat/ A *mitzvah* becomes consecrated by the fact of its Divine origin. Thus, when we perform a *mitzvah* we recite the words uh,umnc ubase ratw “*Who has sanctified us with His mitzvos, and commanded us.*”

This idea may be extended further. Only *Bnei Yisrael*, who are enjoined to perform these *mitzvos*, will become sanctified through their performance. A humanitarian act of loving kindness elevates the Jew who executes it, because he was ordained by Hashem to perform this act. One who acts out of his own sense of humanitarianism, although he may be an honorable person, does not become sanctified through his deed.