

Moshe said to Aharon: Of this did Hashem speak..."I will be sanctified through those who are nearest to Me,thus I will be honored before the entire People." (10:3)

In this *parsha*, the *Torah* recounts the tragic loss of Aharon's two sons, Nadav and Avihu. The tragedy in itself is overwhelming; the fact that two such remarkable young men were taken from us under such circumstances makes it even more difficult to accept. Yet, this is part of the Divine plan. Who are we to question the Almighty? Indeed, *Chazal* state a number of reasons to explain the punitive divine measures against Nadav and Avihu. They are to be considered spiritually deficient only in the context of their lofty plateau of holiness. "*Bikrovai Ekadesh*;" "*I will be sanctified through those who are nearest to Me*," seems to be the stated rationale for such severe justice. When a great saint suffers, Hashem has imposed punishment upon the righteous. Through this act, He conveys a message to the rest of the community. If this is how the righteous suffer, surely the punishment in store for the wicked will be much more severe. Nadav and Avihu were selected to be the two paradigms who would sanctify the *Mishkan*. Moshe told Aharon, "I knew the *Mishkan* would be sanctified by someone in whom the glory of Hashem rests. I thought it would be one of us. I see now that they are greater than either one of us."

We now have some idea of the *madreigah*, spiritual plateau, which Nadav and Avihu attained. This makes the circumstance even more enigmatic. Was the lesson that *Klal Yisrael* would derive from their deaths more important than the lives of these two precious *tzaddikim*? Can we imagine how much we could have learned from their lives? They were greater than Moshe and Aharon. The *Torah* and *chesed* that they might have taught would have been amazing! The opportunity was wiped out in one moment. Their deaths circumvented any possible "living" lesson. Is not the incurred loss greater than the benefit derived from their deaths?

Horav Avigdor Halevi Nebentzhal, Shlita, suggests that it must have been worth it: for Hashem, for *Klal Yisrael* and for Nadav and Avihu. *Chazal* tell us that this deficiency was the only flaw on their spiritual character. Their deaths served to atone not only for their generation, but for all ensuing generations! Indeed, *Chazal* say that one who weeps on *Yom Kippur* -- when the deaths of Nadav and Avihu are read from the *Torah* -- is guaranteed that his sins will be forgiven, and he will not outlive his children.

Yet, Hashem saw fit to remove these two *tzaddikim* from the world. Apparently, they had a greater purpose in death, a greater merit in leaving this world the way they did, than in remaining here. Their *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctification of Hashem's Name, is greater than the entire *Torah* and all of the *mitzvos* that they would have fulfilled during their lifetime.

Kiddush Hashem is the purpose of life. Every creation is created to sanctify Hashem's Name. Performing *mitzvos* and studying *Torah* are all for the purpose of glorifying the Almighty. Hashem felt that teaching the people the idea of *Morah Mikdash*, reverence and awe for the Sanctuary, was

of supreme importance. We understand this from Moshe. He thought that his death would be *mechanech*, dedicate/inaugurate and sanctify the *Mishkan*. He realized that whatever he would accomplish as *Klal Yisrael's* leader would pale in significance to the benefit of *Kiddush Hashem*. He understood that the esteem in which we hold the *Mikdash* is the foundation of our religion. Respect and fear, reverence and awe, define our relationship towards the Sanctuary.

Horav Nebentzhal takes this idea a step further as he explains the concept of *Kiddush Hashem* and its underlying rationale. We have a *halachic* axiom that there are three cardinal sins for which one must give up his life rather than transgress. They are: murder, immorality and idol worship. We can rationalize including murder and immorality; in both circumstances one betrays or hurts another Jew, but why should idol worship be included? As long as the individual knows in his heart that bowing down to this idol is an involuntary act of submission, he should not be compelled to give up his own life. Imagine, a great sage: one whose death will leave a great void in the spiritual landscape of our People; one who would inspire and minister to the spiritual needs of thousands. His positive influence would be eliminated by his unnecessary death. Why should he go through with it?

One must understand that *kavod Shomayim* is the supreme act of service to the Almighty. The honor we accord Him takes precedence over every *Torah*-related endeavor we could ever do. If that basic reverence is lacking, then nothing else has value. This principle is demonstrated by Moshe's willingness and readiness to die in order to dedicate the Sanctuary, to teach *Klal Yisrael* the compelling importance of *kavod Shomayim*. Furthermore, although Nadav and Avihu's act of *Kiddush Hashem* was a public occurrence, it does not have to be that way. The very same obligation applies to an individual in the privacy of his own home - in hiding like so many of our ancestors during pogroms and inquisitions. *Kiddush Hashem* begins in the heart of each individual. Does the Almighty have ultimate value in your eyes? Does He take precedence over everything? Does it have greater importance than your life? Whenever we attribute greater value to anything than we do to the Almighty, it is a blatant desecration of Hashem's Name - regardless if our action is public or private!

In summation: First, *Kiddush Shem Shomayim* is the purpose of Creation and should be the objective of humanity. One who does not have this in mind, who does not place his greatest emphasis on this point, does not fulfill his purpose in life, and, in essence, has no inherent meaning in his life. Second, *Kiddush Hashem* does not necessarily mean to give up one's life for Hashem. One does not have to die to be *mekadesh Shem Shomayim*. There is *kiddush ha'chaim*, the sanctification of life, in which every aspect of our lives reflects the greatest reverence and value to *kavod Shomayim*. After all, this is the way our ancestors lived for thousands of years.