

And your brethren, the entire House of Yisrael, shall bewail the conflagration which Hashem ignited. (10:6)

When we look around today at the Torah world, we are amazed that in a short period of time of some seventy years, we have gone from a nation of broken Jewry, to a world of Torah study unlike anything in previous times. While the numbers of committed, scholarly Torah Jews have probably increased with the level of Torah study and erudition achieved in our *yeshivos* unlike anything one can remember, the quality of Jewish commitment, the abrogation of materialism that bespoke the average European Jews, is no longer. We may know more and *daven* longer and understand what we are saying, but the quality of *davening*, the commitment to Torah study – regardless of one's energy level – is remarkably different. Today, we are a far cry from the world that was. The *amcha Yid*, Jew whose belief in Hashem was simple but unequivocal, is gone. Today, everything is done with *cheshbonos*, calculations, justifications and reasons. Then, it was just done!

Obviously, I am leading up to something. In the commentary to *Parashas Shemini*, the *Yalkut Reuveni* quotes the *Zohar HaKadosh* who writes: One who lets down tears (cries) during the reading of the deaths of Aharon *HaKohen's* two sons will merit not to lose his children during his lifetime. While the deaths of Nadav and Avihu constitute an epic tragedy, why does it take center stage to all of the other tragedies that our nation has sustained throughout its tumultuous history?

Speaking about the void left following the Holocaust, the *Ponevezer Rav, zl*, asked this question. He cited the *Midrash* which quotes Moshe *Rabbeinu* as implying that Nadav and Avihu had achieved a spiritual plateau greater even than that of Moshe and Aharon. With this in mind, taking into consideration that Nadav and Avihu died at a relatively young age, had they lived full lives, their spiritual level would have been accordingly way beyond that of Moshe and Aharon. A leader has a profound spiritual influence on his generation. The greater the leader, the more exalted is his generation. Every generation descends spiritually from its forebears. Thus, had Nadav and Avihu lived, their generation would have achieved an even greater plateau than it did under Moshe and Aharon. So the void left by their early demise is felt by each ensuing generation, which is that much less spiritually accomplished due to the premature loss to our people that they experienced.

With this in mind, let us just for a moment imagine the immeasurable spiritual void left by the loss of the pre-World War II generation of European Jewry. Thus, whatever we have achieved is nothing – absolutely nothing – to what we would have attained had that tragedy not occurred. That is a sobering thought which should impact our approach to *Yiddishkeit*. Not only are we not as great as we think – we are not remotely close to what we could have been!