

I will be sanctified through those who are nearest to Me, thus I will be honored before the entire People. (10:3)

Bikrovai ekadeish, “I will be sanctified through those nearest to Me,” are two words that instill fear and awe, because they are words that are often uttered following a tragedy in which the best, those closest to Hashem, are taken from within our midst. One who is exposed to greater inspiration, to greater Heavenly illumination – whose spiritual cognition is more profound – is on a higher spiritual plane. He is nearer to Hashem; therefore, more is expected of him. *Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl*, explains that this was the reason for the punishment received by the *mekoshesh eitzim*, one who gathers twigs on *Shabbos*. True, it is *chillul Shabbos*, desecrating the *Sabbath*, but it is not as if he had been observant for that long. Why not give him a break?

Rav Zaitchik suggests that the Torah answers this question when it writes, *Vayiheyu Bnei Yisrael bamidbar*, “And *Bnei Yisrael* were in the wilderness” (*Bamidbar* 15:32). What difference does it make where they were? Does being in the desert change the sin? Yes! The nation was exposed to the greatest possible centralized *kedushah*: Moshe, Aharon, Miriam, the *Zekeinim* – they were all there – teaching, praying, talking, inspiring. What more utopian spiritual life does one require? When one is surrounded with *kedushah*, holiness, when it is palpable, the sin becomes commensurately magnified. One who is spiritually greater must act in a manner that coincides with his spiritual position.

We now understand why the punishment of Nadav and Avihu was so quick and so harsh. They had reached the epitome of *kedushah*. At that point, one’s spiritual persona and demeanor must reflect his closeness to Hashem. Otherwise, he becomes an example of *bikrovai ekadeish*. Indeed, this is to be noted from the *pasuk* later in *Acharei Mos* (*Vayikra* 16:1), “After the death of Aharon’s two sons, when they approached (*b’karvasam*) before Hashem, and they died.” Because they were so close to the Divine, they were judged with meticulous and unforgiving exactitude. As the *Abarbanel* writes, “Those who are close to Hashem are like the soldiers who fight in the fray of war, who are at the front of battle. The risk is that much greater.”

The *Divrei Chaim*, *Horav Chaim Halberstam, zl*, of Sanz, met his close friend the *Ateres Yeshuah, zl*, *Rebbe* of Dzikov. These two great *Admorim* were the *ziknei ha’dor*, elder spiritual statesmen, of their generation. The *Sanzer* complained to his friend, “Oy, where have the days gone? My beard is already white, and I have yet to repent for the sins that I committed in my youth.”

The *Ateres Yeshuah* noticed that a younger man who was listening remarked, “If the holy *Sanzer* has yet to repent for the sins of his youth, then I do not have it so bad.” The *Rebbe* looked at him with a sort of derision and said, “Do you know what you are saying? Do you have any idea what constitutes the sins of the *Sanzer*? His sin was thinking of a question on the *Rambam* during *Shemoneh Esrai*! His devotion to Hashem was interrupted because he could not detract his mind from Torah study. For this, he has been repenting for seventy years! Are you prepared to compare

your sins to his sins?" In other words, our *mitzvos* pale in comparison with their *aveiros*.

We infer from here a new term for defining a holy, devout, righteous Jew: *karov*. The goal of religious observance should be to bring us closer to Hashem to the point that He refers to us as *Kerovi*, My close ones. From a psychological perspective, interdependence characterizes a close relationship. Obviously, someone who is close to Hashem feels dependent upon the Almighty. Hashem, of course, does not maintain that degree of closeness to us. Furthermore, interdependence in a close relationship can be experienced along three dimensions: cognitive; emotional; behavioral. Cognitively, emotional closeness means that one thinks of the other person. Emotionally, one misses the other person when they are physically apart. Behaviorally, one seeks every avenue to make the relationship a priority. While these terms describe a physical relationship between two people, there is no reason we should be any different vis-à-vis Hashem. We should depend only on Him. We crave *davening* and learning because, through these acts, we feel His Presence. Closeness to Hashem should be our priority in life. Whenever we are unable to experience this closeness, we should feel that something is missing from our lives.

In an alternative exposition of *Bikrovai Ekadeish v'al pnei ha'am Echabeid*, *Horav Baruch, zl, m'Komarna* taught that only those who are close to Hashem, who have achieved spiritual ascendancy, are able to accept without question what appears to be enigmatic decrees from Hashem. Everyone else, the *am*, members of the nation, have difficulty accepting what appears to be harsh decrees.

During the Holocaust, many were overcome with questions of faith. Death and deprivation was everywhere, with the Jewish people representing one large tragedy. *Ein bayis asher ein sham meis*, "There was no home/family that had not experienced a death." People were distraught, unable to grapple with the overwhelming issues they confronted. The *Rebbe* explained, "Following the tragic deaths of Nadav and Avihu, Hashem *Yisborach* knew that people would be overcome with questions, wondering: Is this the reward one receives for devotion to Torah? Of all people, should Aharon *HaKohen*, the individual whose love for all Jews was boundless, be the one to suffer such a tragic loss?"

Hashem said to Moshe *Rabbeinu*, *Bikrovai Ekadeish*, "By those whose belief in Me is unequivocal, who have no questions, I will be sanctified. They will understand that this was necessary to sanctify My Name. *V'al kol pnei ha'am*, but, with regard to the rest of the nation, the simple Jew, who is not yet able to grasp the larger picture, *Eichabeid*, 'I will weigh down/become heavy with questions (from the word *kaveid*, heavy).' They will not understand why it was specifically Aharon who sustained such an unprecedented, unparalleled loss."

The *Rebbe* concluded, "Let us be from among those who are close to Hashem, who have no questions, who accept His decree with love."