

"And the sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, took each his censer... and offered strange fire before Hashem, which He had not commanded them." (10:1)

Much has been written regarding the "sin" that Nadav and Avihu committed. We must understand their transgression in a manner relative to the unique lofty level of *kedushah* they had attained. They should not be viewed as common sinners. We can, however, attempt to learn from the "errors" that they committed. While keeping their actions in perspective, we can internalize a lesson for ourselves. Amongst the various indiscretions attributed to Nadav and Avihu is the offering up of a *korban* "which Hashem had not commanded them." What is the meaning of not having been commanded? Is there something wrong with a voluntary offering reflecting one's own choice?

Addressing this question, **Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl**, explains that there is no place allowed in the offerings of the Sanctuary for one to do whatever he wants. Simply put, just because a specific service is appropriate in one's mind, it is not necessarily correct. Even the *korbanos nedavah*, free-willed offerings, must be kept within the limits which the *Torah* prescribes for them. The goal of all *korbanos*, to become closer with the Source of all *kedushah*, can be attained only through complete subordination to Hashem's directive.

It is in this area of service that a great distinction differentiates Judaism from the pagan ritual. The pagan offers sacrifices in an attempt to bring the god closer to him. He attempts to subdue his god in order to compel him to fulfill his demands. The Jew uses his *korban* as a way of submitting himself to Hashem, choreographing his acquiescence to serving Him. Consequently, devising one's own form of offering is contrary to the purpose of *korbanos*. One would foolishly be glorifying his own ideas, when he should be building a throne for obedience.

The deaths of Nadav and Avihu are a solemn message for all future leaders who will serve in the Sanctuary, who will exert their spiritual influence over *Klal Yisrael*. No innovation of one's own mind may supplement the service. Only that which has been transmitted via *mesorah*, which has been Divinely ordained as "right" and "proper," is to be included in the ritual. How tragic is it that the "old fashioned" rituals, representing a standard of obedience, has been felt by some to be archaic. How tragic is it that they which was acceptable and proper for thousands of years suddenly become out of tune with the times. How tragic is it that we do not heed the message of the *Torah*.