

A fire came forth from before Hashem and consumed them and they died before Hashem. (10:2)

Chazal enumerate a number of areas of deficiency in the behavior of Nadav and Avihu which, on their lofty level, was considered sinful. One of their shortcomings was manifest in their drinking wine prior to performing the service. Inebriation might find an acceptable place in contemporary society's morally bankrupt value system, but it certainly did not belong in the Priestly service. While Nadav and Avihu certainly did not entertain the idea of inebriation, this does not preclude their partaking in a glass of wine. Truth be told, they were not commanded against drinking wine prior to performing the service until after the fact – and then they were gone. It was their brothers who were the beneficiaries of this law. How could it be held against them? This question is posed by the *Rosh* (*Teshuvos*, 20). He explains that they should have learned a lesson from precedent, having seen examples of individuals (Noach, Lot) who, upon being lax with alcohol, had erred. Likewise, Nadav and Avihu should have realized that wine causes one to err. Indeed, it is quite possible that their error in the service occurred as a result of the wine.

People should take a lesson from the past. Lot drank; consequently, he lost control of his faculties and acted licentiously. Noach did not fare well when he had too much wine. One does not have to be extraordinarily brilliant to realize that wine can be dangerous.

Veritably, Noach did not have from whom to learn about the ills of inebriation – but Lot did. Furthermore, Lot should have learned from his first night's travesty with his daughter. Why did he repeat his error? (Truthfully, Noach could have learned from Adam *HaRishon*, who some commentators contend ate from a grape.) Not only should one learn from the past mistakes of others, he should also learn from his own past mistakes.

Some of life's most meaningful and compelling lessons are derived from those who have lived before us, whose experiences were similar to what we are going through today. If we listen and respond to their advice, they might even guide us toward choices that are beneficial to us. Surely, they can steer us away from making flawed decisions based upon reckless indifference to what others have to say. These mistakes can not only hinder our success, they can destroy us. Furthermore, on a positive note, when we look to grandparents, parents, mentors and friends who have "been there and done that," we find examples of faith, commitment, hard work, dedication and sacrifice – qualities that guide us towards the path of success.

Judaism is a rendezvous between the past and the future. We are enjoined a number of times in the Torah to *z'chor*, remember, various experiences that have molded our nationhood. *Zikaron* means memory, which is the inactive form of *z'chor*. By constantly fulfilling the commandment to remember actively, we see to it that the past is not relegated to a distant history; it does not become an inactive memory, but it is incorporated into the present. If our future is to become a reality, we must see to it that it is firmly anchored in the bedrock of the past. Life moves on. We

must move on with time and learn to acclimate ourselves with the benefits and challenges of the present, so that we can hope and plan for the future. Someone who lives only in the past lives a life filled with nothingness. The past is gone. It remains a source of direction for the future, with lessons garnered from the past. Unless we look backwards, we have great difficulty properly focusing on going forwards.

The secular movements which began to germinate in Germany and Russia at the end of the eighteenth century, and then metastasized to America in the mid-nineteenth century, saw the past as a hindrance to realizing their idea of the future. Thus, the adherents broke ties with the past. Without history there is no stability, no anchor, no pride. One cannot look forward to anything if he has nothing on which to look back, but (in their alienated minds) shame.

The adherents of the secular movements were ashamed of the persecution, of the pogroms, of the fact that the Jews were considered parasites. It troubled them. Rather than accept that Hashem providentially guided their lives and that everything occurred for a reason, they chose to ignore both Hashem and the reason. Why should one own up to his obligations to the Heavenly messages that he receives if he can just as easily sever his connection and be oblivious to them?

Thus, they broke with the past. They lived for the present. Sadly, they neither have a substantial present, nor do they harbor much hope for the future. All because they broke with the past.