

And they brought before Hashem an alien fire that He had not commanded them... And Aharon was silent. (10:1,3)

Much has been written concerning the apparent misstep of Nadav and Avihu in offering what was considered an alien fire, and the reaction of their father, Aharon *HaKohen*, to their tragic deaths. *Chazal* have analyzed and explained every word in order to give later generations a clue, a path for understanding and coming to grips with this tragedy. The Torah writes, *Asher lo tzivah osam*, "That He (Hashem) had not commanded them." Apparently, their sin was in acting on their own. Discipline is obviously important, but is it that demanding? The *Chiddushei HaRim* sheds light on this "sin." He derives from the words *Asher lo tzivah lahem* that man's claim to greatness is only to the extent to which he fulfills Hashem's commands.

Nadav and Avihu were *tzaddikim gemurim*, completely righteous men, whose intent was certainly *l'shem Shomayim*, for the glory of Heaven. Yet, there was one thing missing from their act of devotion: *tzivui Hashem*. *Asher lo tzivah osam*: Although they had not been commanded to act, they did so. From their punishment, explains the *Chiddushei HaRim*, we derive an important lesson: carrying out Hashem's command is what makes an action important – not its intrinsic value. *Yiddishkeit* is a religion built upon *dvar Hashem*, the word/command of G-d. When one severs the act from the command, the *mitzvah* becomes lifeless.

When Aharon *HaKohen* remained silent following the deaths of his sons, it was not merely to suppress his actual emotions. Indeed, this silence bespoke his true greatness. Aharon had the ability to abrogate himself completely – body and soul – to Hashem's Will. Hashem selected him to be the *Kohen Gadol*, explains the *Sfas Emes*, because of his sole desire to fulfill the Will of Hashem, Who commanded him. *Vayidom Aharon* was his affirmation of Hashem's Will, his acceptance of Hashem's judgment. *Bikerovai Ekadesh*, "Through those closest to Me, I will be sanctified." Regardless of one's spiritual eminence, in order to achieve closeness to Hashem he must carry out His Will. Aharon's suppression of emotion was, in effect, atonement for his sons' overzealousness to serve. The ultimate service to Hashem is to perform His Will. This is one instance when "extra credit" can detract from the actual achievement.