

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

We cannot downplay the tragedy of Nadav and Avihu's untimely passing on what would have been the most auspicious day of their lives. The commentators attribute a number of spiritual failings to them, which ultimately led to their offering an *eish zarah*, strange fire, a fire which Hashem had not commanded. We are a nation built on obedience to Hashem. We follow His Will when He expresses it, and, when He does not, we wait. We do not act on our own, independently of the word of Hashem. Among the infractions of which Hashem held them culpable was, *Shelo natlu eitzah zeh mizeh*, "They did not seek guidance or advice – from anyone, nor from one another." The Torah considers their "impulsive" actions to be a critical flaw in their otherwise lofty spiritual aspirations. (We must add that Nadav and Avihu had achieved such an elevated spiritual status that the most miniscule infraction – which would never be held against anyone else – tainted their spiritual persona.) Their lack of deference to authority – to Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon *HaKohen*, the two spiritual leaders of the generation – demonstrated a slight vestige of arrogance or spiritual isolation. They acted on their own understanding, disconnected from the collective framework of Torah leadership and Divine command.

We need, however, to address a second aspect of their isolation. They did not take advice from one another. Their sin is derived from the word *machtaso*, his incense pan. They did not offer an offering together. They each, separately, without discussing it with the other, brought an offering. These were to be the future leaders of the nation. If they could not – or would not – consult with one another, if they acted independently of one another, they had a deeper issue, a lack of unity and collaboration. Their failure to act as a team, particularly in their *avodas hakodesh*, reflects a critical flaw in their spiritual demeanor. By acting independently of one another, they prioritized their personal spiritual desires over the collective sanctity of the *Mishkan*. Their disunity was inappropriate in the context of the *Mishkan*, where *achdus*, unity, is essential. If they were unable to integrate their spiritual aspirations into a cohesive communal framework, they should not stand at the helm of the nation. Their behavior was incompatible with the purpose of the *Mishkan*.

How are we to understand that Nadav and Avihu's making a decision on their own, their failure to consult with one another, could have such tragic consequences? *Horav Dov Povarsky, Shlita*, explains that human fallibility is a fact of life. Thus, those who rely solely on their own judgment are bound to err. If one seeks to achieve clarity, avoid bias and achieve a balanced outcome, he will collaborate, look for and accept diverse perspectives. Consulting others actually refines our own thoughts and guards us from the pitfalls of limited perspective or emotional involvement in an issue. Nadav and Avihu ignored this basic imperative. Is the punishment consistent with the infraction? That is not up to us to decide or even question. It was a Divine mandate, based upon the spiritual perfection of Nadav and Avihu and the far-reaching ramifications of their actions.

His physician told the *Chazon Ish zl*, that he should take a daily walk for his health. To this end, he

would walk through the orchards of Bnei Brak. (In those days there were orchards.) One day, a fellow who lived in the area noticed a non-descript Orthodox Jew taking a “pleasure” walk during the day. The man could not understand how a Jew (he, of course, had no clue that the man was the *Chazon Ish*, who walked for health reasons) could waste precious learning time walking away his life. The sage asked the man to advise him what he should do. The man replied, “Recite *Tehillim*, if you are unable to learn. Just do not waste time.” A short while later, this man confronted a period of serious adversity. He was advised to go to the *Chazon Ish* and petition his blessing. One can only imagine the shock and subsequent shame this man experienced when he entered the room and realized that the man he had criticized was none other than the *gadol hador*, Torah leader of the generation. He begged forgiveness of the sage, who replied, “On the contrary, I owe you a debt of gratitude. Ever since that time that you advised me to recite *Tehillim*, I make a point to do so daily.” A true leader encourages advice – and acts on it.

Is the timing of the tragic deaths of Nadav and Avihu on *yom ha’shemini*, the eighth day of the *milluim*, inauguration of the *Mishkan*, a factor in their sin? True, they committed their error on that auspicious day, but, had it been another day, would the sin have been as great? In the *pesichah*, preface, to his commentary to the *parshah*, *Rabbeinu Bachya* writes about the significance of the number seven. He explains that the number seven has equal significance in both the celestial and terrestrial spheres. Indeed, many *mitzvos* revolve around the number seven. *Shabbos* is the seventh day of the week. *Yovel* is the conclusion of seven cycles of *Shemittah*, seven years. Both *Succos* and *Pesach* are seven days long. The components of the *Arba Minim*, Four Species, are seven (one *lulav*, one *esrog*, two *aravos*, three *hadasim*). The seven days of *shivah*, mourning, the *shivah yemei mishteh*, and the seven days of nuptial celebration all have a connection with the number seven.

The common denominator of these practices or *mitzvos* is the number seven, which somehow symbolizes the seven days during which Hashem created and completed the universe. Even the pagan Bilaam understood the significance of the number seven: he erected seven Altars. Thus, the Seven Days of Inauguration follows their lead. The spiritual origin of these rites involving the number seven is one and the same. If so, why was Aharon not consecrated on the seventh day?

Aharon was consecrated on the *yom ha’shemini*, eighth day, due to the uniqueness of that day’s service. Being that Hashem is essentially “one” (He is truly the only perfect “one”), Aharon acknowledged this symbolism by commencing his duties as *Kohen Gadol* on the “first” day after the Seven Days of his Inauguration. The eighth day is the day of “one.”

Having said that the *yom ha’shemini*, the auspicious day on which the *Kohen Gadol* was inducted, the *Kohanim* were inducted, and the *Mishkan* was inaugurated, the day that symbolized *achdus*, unity, at its perfection, the infraction of acting without consulting one another is more egregious. Today was supposed to be the perfect “one.” Sadly, it was split into two.