

“Do not leave your heads unshorn and do not rend your garments that you not die...and your brethren the entire House of Yisrael shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited.” (10:6)

Aharon *HaKohen*'s two eldest sons died in a terrible, tragic fire that consumed their souls, yet left their bodies intact. It was to be a day of heightened joy, the greatest *simchah* for Hashem, for Aharon and for all of *Klal Yisrael*. It was the day that the *Mishkan* was to be dedicated. The festivities were tragically marred. Yet, Aharon and his sons were commanded that, as *Kohanim*, they could not exhibit any outward signs of mourning. It was Hashem's day. Their personal grief was not to detract from Hashem's *simchah*. On the other hand, *Klal Yisrael* was adjured to mourn to the point that if they were to act as the *Kohanim* and not mourn, Hashem would be angry with them. Two distinguished *tzaddikim*, righteous scholars, had perished, and everyone was obligated to mourn their loss. Everyone, except the *Kohanim*.

There are a number of issues that should be addressed. First, we do not find elsewhere the expression, “*the conflagration that Hashem ignited,*” in regard to the death of the righteous. Furthermore, in regard to other *tzaddikim*, there is a specific time frame for observing the mourning period for them: seven days, thirty days, one year. Regarding the sons of Aharon, it seems to be an ongoing period of mourning. In fact, *Chazal* teach us that if one weeps during *Minchah* on *Yom Kippur*, when the deaths of Aharon's sons is read, he will merit that his own sons will not, *chas v'shalom*, Heaven Forbid, be taken away during his lifetime. In other words, the obligation to mourn for Nadav and Avihu is unremitting. Why?

Horav Elchanan Sorotzkin, z.l., explains that the grief and weeping we are to undergo is not for the deaths of Aharon's sons, per se, but rather, for the cause of their premature passing from this world.

Chazal cite a number of reasons which, in accordance to their lofty, spiritual status, manifested a deficiency: Whether it is because they entered the Sanctuary after having imbibed; or they had not yet married; they were not wearing all the necessary vestments; they rendered a *halachic* decision in the presence of their *rebbe*, Moshe; they walked behind Moshe and Aharon saying, “When will those two old ones pass on and we will become the leaders of the nation?” These are some of the spiritual shortcomings attributed to Nadav and Avihu. It certainly does not mean that they actually erred in these areas. *Chazal* are telling us that Nadav and Avihu acted in such a manner that others following them a generation or two later might act inappropriately, based upon the way they acted now. Nadav and Avihu's minor indiscretions would be magnified by others, who would actually be guilty of these sins.

This is something to cry about. This is truly a reason to mourn – all the time. In every generation, whenever a death like Aharon’s sons’ – a spiritual death in which the body remains intact and only the *neshamah* is lost – is experienced, we must mourn. It is our function and obligation throughout time to educate our youth, to imbue them with the necessary values and virtues, so they do not become guilty of the shortcomings manifest by Aharon’s sons. When we notice a problem, it is a reason for weeping. Indeed, if we will take those problems to heart; if we will grieve when a Jewish *neshamah* is faltering; when we will conquer the indifference and apathy that reigns within us; when we will stop raising up our hands to Heaven in defeat when we confront children who are “at risk” and instead grieve and do something about it – we will merit that the deaths of Aharon’s sons, the spiritual loss of our young people, will no longer occur.