

And the sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, each took his fire pan, they put fire in them and placed incense upon it; and they brought before Hashem an alien fire that Hashem had not commanded them. (10:1)

It all boils down to the last four words: *Asher lo tzivah Hashem*, “That Hashem had not commanded them.” The best laid intentions are of little value if they go against someone’s wishes. In his *Sefer Nitzotzos*, **Horav Yitzchak HersHKovitz, Shlita**, gives a practical analogy. Reuven had a good friend, Shimon, whom he had invited to stay at his house whenever he was in the area. Shimon was a welcome guest who would not over-extend his welcome. He would come for a few days, enjoy, and leave. Reuven felt very comfortable inviting Shimon to stay as long as necessary – even if he was not home. In fact, Reuven gave Shimon the key to his house to make himself at home. Once Shimon’s visit coincided with one of Reuven’s business trips. Reuven was only too glad to allow Shimon the run of his house – while he was gone.

Reuven was gone for a week. When he returned, he discovered that his house had been treated to a complete makeover! Shimon had changed the selection of paint colors adorning the walls. He even changed the furniture and carpeting. When Reuven discovered this, he went ballistic. “What right did you have to change the paint on the walls?” he asked. “I felt the colors were not in tune with the times. They were drab and flaking. I wanted to add more life to this dull house,” Shimon countered. “That is why I also changed the carpeting and furniture,” he added. “What right did you have to do what you want in my house? I am the one who determines what color scheme should be prominent in my home. If I wanted to redecorate, I would have hired an interior decorator. You had no right to alter anything in my home. I allowed you to stay here – not take over!”

A few weeks later, Reuven once again left for a business trip. This time, however, Shimon did not house-sit for him. One day, an electrical surge caused the wiring to misfire and the house to catch fire. Very soon, the entire house was engulfed with flames. Shimon happened to be in the neighborhood and saw the conflagration. He did not think twice, as he ran into the house. After calling 911, he was able to save most of Reuven’s valuables. The firemen, who arrived shortly, did the rest. Shimon was a hero, but he was anxious concerning Reuven’s reaction. After all, he had once again mixed in where he did not belong. He had acted without Reuven’s express permission.

When Reuven returned, he did not have words sufficient to thank Shimon. Indeed, Reuven was effusive with praise and gratitude. “I thought you would be angry with me,” Shimon said.

“Why?” asked Reuven. “You did me an incredible favor. You saved most of my house and my valuables.”

“But I acted without your permission,” Shimon said.

“What is the comparison?” Reuven answered. The first time you took it upon yourself to do something which you were not asked to do. There was nothing compelling you to act. You did it completely of your own volition. This time, it was quite the opposite. My house was burning. If you were to wait until you got in touch with me, my house and everything in it would have been lost. There is a time and place for everything. This was a time to act. I owe you an enormous debt of gratitude. In fact, with this latest act of heroism on your part, you corrected the detriment to our relationship that resulted from your acting on impulse without asking my permission.”

A similar idea applies to the incident of Nadav and Avihu’s offering, *asher lo tzivah osam*, which Hashem did not command. The Jewish nation is founded and maintained on obedience to the Almighty. We do not act freely on our own, simply because we think it is the correct thing to do. We wait for His command, then we immediately act with reverence and love. Even if in our minds we feel that the time to act is now, we wait for Hashem’s command. When the situation is out of control, when the honor of Heaven is impugned by those whose agenda runs counter to the Torah, we do not wait for a command. We immediately take up arms and act. This was the scenario when Pinchas slew Zimri in the midst of the latter’s moral outrage. There comes a time, such as when the house is on fire, that asking for permission is foolhardy and self-defeating. Indeed, Pinchas’ act of zealousness, by elevating the glory of Heaven, repaired the initial breach that he had made earlier.