

And they offered an alien fire before G-d which He had not commanded them. (10:1)

Emotions motivate a person to scale the highest elevations. When a person is positively motivated; when he is inspired to do good, he can achieve success in what otherwise would be considered a difficult task. Positive emotion catalyzes greatness. There is, however, one caveat: the emotion must be harnessed and focused. To live on emotion alone, without direction and discipline, invites dangerous consequences.

A student in a *yeshivah* was extremely devoted to his spiritual development. A sincere and seriously motivated young man, he would spend twenty minutes in deep devotion as he recited *Shemoneh Esrai*. Thursday night *mishmor*, when other students in the *yeshivah* would stay up late learning, he would stay up all night and study through Friday, not going to bed until Friday night. He exhibited extreme care in observing *halachah*; he was meticulous in carrying out every *mitzvah* according to every possible *chumra* and *hiddur*, stringency and beautification of the *mitzvah*. He refused to speak unless it was extremely necessary, lest he utter a word of *lashon hora*, slanderous speech. It, therefore, came as a total shock when this young man went off the *derech*, snapped (so to speak) and rejected everything related to religious observance. Obviously, he had experienced too much emotion and had insufficiently channeled this emotion. It was inspiration gone wild, uncontrolled, unbridled passion, too much heart and inadequate mind. One must have balance and self-control.

We may derive this idea from the tragedy that occurred concerning Nadav and Avihu. Even the greatest, most profound, righteous devotees must be commanded to act. One does not act on his own. Otherwise it is *eish zarah*, alien fire. As **Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl**, points out, Nadav and Avihu's intention and devotion were praiseworthy. After all, they are referred to as *Kerovai*, "My close ones." They were the best of the best, for, indeed, their tragedy served as the catalyst for sanctifying Hashem's Name. So what went wrong? "They were not commanded."

Kirvas Elokim, the proximity – and getting near – to G-d, which is the purpose of *korbanos*, sacrificial offerings, is only to be found by way of obedience, by compliance with the will of Hashem. This is where Judaism is in a diametrically opposed posture to that of pagan belief and ritual. The pagan brings his offering as a means for making his god subservient to his wishes. The Jew, with his offering, wishes to place himself in the service of Hashem. By his service, he wishes to subjugate himself to the will of Hashem. Rav Hirsch explains that all offerings are formulae of Hashem's demands, which the *makriv*, bringer of *the korban*, seeks to incorporate into the normal routine of his life. Thus, self-devised offerings are the very neutralization of those verities which our *korbanos* are meant to impress on – and dominate the mind of – the bringer. One who acts of his own volition is placing a pedestal to glorify his own ideas, rather than erecting a throne for obedience – and obedience only.

With the fiery deaths of these two *kerovim* to Hashem, at the very onset of the consecration of the *Mishkan*, a most solemn warning for all future *Kohanim* was conveyed. Regardless of its motivation and sincerity; capricious behavior – subjective ideas of what is correct and proper – has no business in the sanctuary of service to Hashem. We serve G-d not by innovation, but by executing that which is ordained by Him. This is how the *Kohen* affirms the authenticity of his activities.