

each took his firepan ... and they brought before Hashem an alien fire ... and a fire went out ... and consumed them and they died before Hashem." (10:1,2)

Chazal cite a number of reasons for the terrible decree accorded to Nadav and Avihu. Undoubtedly, their sins are to be viewed as relative iniquities in accordance with the sublime level of *kedushah*, holiness, attained by Nadav and Avihu. One reason presented by *Chazal* is difficult to accept. They state that Nadav and Avihu walked behind Moshe and Aharon and remarked, "When will these two old men (Moshe and Aharon) die, so that we can assume the mantle of leadership?" How do we reconcile ourselves to this statement? Are we to believe that these two spiritual giants would be so base as to look forward to the deaths of their father and *rebbe*? Obviously, there must be a deeper level of meaning in *Chazal's* critique of Nadav and Avihu.

Horav Asher Kalmen Baron, z.l., suggests a novel interpretation of *Chazal*. Nadav and Avihu articulated a specific criticism of Moshe and Aharon's behavior. They felt that their *rebbeim* "were too lenient and overly tolerant." Aharon *Ha'Kohen* was the paragon of virtue, always seeking to promote harmony among people. Moshe also exhibited remarkable patience in dealing with such miscreants as Dasan and Aviram. Moshe demonstrated an amazing ability to absolve the invidious behavior of those who defiantly challenged his authority. According to Nadav and Avihu, this attitude did not reflect resolute strength. A leader must be firm in not overlooking rebellion. Nadav and Avihu posited that if they were to become the leaders of *Klal Yisrael* they would not be so sympathetic. They would deal with extreme prejudice in expunging this evil from *Klal Yisrael*.

This feeling that "I can do better" thinly veiled an inner anticipation for that moment when they might ascend to the position of leadership. It would certainly be blasphemous, however, to even suspect that Nadav and Avihu harbored evil thoughts of "when will those two old men die and you and I will lead." Only the dissatisfaction with -- or second- guessing of -- present *Torah* leadership, in a relative way reflects ill of those expressing their concern. Hashem is very demanding concerning the behavior of *tzaddikim*. It was such a demand that precipitated the tragic decree against Aharon's sons.