

"Of this did Hashem speak saying: 'I will be sanctified through those who are nearest Me, thus I will be honored before the entire people.'" (10:3)

Rashi cites Moshe's dialogue with Aharon immediately following Nadav and Avihu's deaths. "I knew the *Mishkan* would be sanctified in those whom Hashem's glory reposes," Moshe said to Aharon, "but I thought it would be either one of us. Now I know that they were greater than either one of us." Indeed, *Chazal* view Nadav and Avihu, who met their deaths in such a tragic manner, as being great *tzaddikim*. In the *machzor* for *Yom Kippur*, it is stated that one who sheds tears over the deaths of the two sons of Aharon will not see the premature demise of his own children. One may question the uniqueness of this incident, that thousands of years after its occurrence, it should be remembered with more intensity than other tragedies which have befallen *Klal Yisrael* during its tumultuous history.

Horav Yosef S. Kahaneman, z.l., the *Ponevezher Rav*, explained this enigma in the following manner. In speaking to Aharon regarding Nadav and Avihu, the *Midrash* states that Moshe said, "They are greater than you and I." These simple words demonstrate the lofty spiritual level attained by these two young *kedoshim*. Moshe and Aharon, under whose leadership *Klal Yisrael* made the transition from a nation of slaves to a spiritual people, the chosen nation of Hashem, are implying that Nadav and Avihu are greater than they are! Imagine, if you will, what *Klal Yisrael* would have looked like had Aharon's sons not perished! Forty years of the influence of Nadav and Avihu would undoubtedly have effected a greater "change" in *Klal Yisrael's* spiritual image. The imprimatur of these *kedoshim* would have elevated our spiritual plateau to even greater heights.

Their premature deaths precluded this remarkable growth destined for *Klal Yisrael*. This is cause for eternal mourning. Their deaths evinced unparalleled damage to the spiritual fiber of *Klal Yisrael*. We must mourn their loss until this very day. It is apparent even in our own lives that Nadav and Avihu were taken from us thousands of years ago.

The *Ponevezher Rav* made these insights in the context of a lecture in reference to the *Churban* Europe/Holocaust. He explained that the tragic loss of six million Jewish souls was not a calamity felt only by the previous generation. It is a cataclysmic loss which should be felt for posterity. An entire culture was eternally destroyed. The ramifications of that tragedy affect us daily in every area of our lives. What we are, our perspective on life, our aspirations and proclivities, would be much different had Jewish Europe not come to such a tragic end. We must mourn for that as if we had been there, for in reality, its effect is taking place now!

There is a famous story that took place when Napoleon Bonaparte entered a *shul* on *Tishah B'Av*. Upon noticing the congregation sitting on the floor, reciting *Kinos* in a mournful tone, he was struck by this puzzling behavior. He questioned his aides regarding this Jewish "tradition." They responded somewhat mockingly, "The Jews are mourning their Temple that was destroyed

thousands of years ago." To this remark Napoleon retorted, "A people who can still mourn for their Temple that was destroyed thousands of years ago will endure to see it rebuilt." This statement encapsulates our mandate. We must recognize the present loss incurred by the tragedies of the past. Only by "remembering" these events and reflecting upon them, will we merit our ultimate redemption. To paraphrase the *Baal Shem Tov*, "Forgetfulness leads to exile; remembrance is the secret of redemption."