

## And Nadav and Avihu, the two sons of Aharon, each took his fire pan...and they brought before Hashem an alien fire that He had not commanded them. (10:1)

*Asher lo tzivah osam*, “That He had not commanded them.” Herein lies the error of Nadav and Avihu – two individuals whose piety brought them into the league of Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon *HaKohen*. Yet, they did not make it, and were struck down, because they performed what they thought was a great service. The *Chidushei HaRim* derives from the words; “that He had not commanded them,” that man’s claim to distinction in serving Hashem is only relevant to the extent that he carries out Hashem’s command, that he executes His Will. Nadav and Avihu were very righteous, and they certainly did not intend to be disobedient. Yet, they erred in their service of Hashem. How? Their act of religious devotion lacked one crucial component: Hashem had not commanded them, and therefore it never should have been done.

Judaism is a religion of command, of obedience: *Torah tzivah lanu Moshe*, “The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the Congregation of Yaakov” (*Devarim* 33:4). As soon as a child learns to speak, his parents teach him this fundamental precept. We have 613 *mitzvos*, commandments and understanding the nature of *tzivui*, command, is part of developing a cognitive appreciation of *Klal Yisrael’s* relationship with Hashem. Basically, it is a relationship contingent on *mitzvah* performance.

What is a *mitzvah*? It is a command from Hashem which we accept wholeheartedly, without question. We try to carry out *mitzvos* with an excitement and enthusiasm borne of love and obedience. There is no hesitation, no mistrust, no second-guessing. There is no place for rationalization, dialectic, or intellectual discourse. Hashem commands and we fulfill His command – without question and with due diligence. *Mitzvos* are precious, because they allow us to carry out the Divine Will without our added input. It is “pure Hashem.” This is what the Almighty wants from us.

When man rationalizes and follows up with his own opinion/advice, it is no longer Hashem’s command. It becomes man’s command. *Mitzvah* defines our identity as being one with Hashem. We are in total obedience. A *mitzvah’s* distinction is in carrying it out exactly as commanded – not delving into its profundities and inner meanings. This does not render it irrelevant, or inappropriate to study these profundities, but one must always acknowledge and recognize the lines of demarcation between Hashem’s Will and man’s will.

Based upon the *Chidushei HaRim’s* thesis, the *Sefas Emes* offers a penetrating interpretation of Nadav’s and Avihu’s sin. *Chazal* inform us that one of the reasons for their punishment was that they entered the *Mishkan* while under the influence of wine. While this sin is **totally** beyond our ability to grasp, as it was a transgression only relative to their lofty relationship with the Divine, it must be addressed and explained. The *Sefas Emes* explains this from a homiletic sense. Shlomo

*Ha'melech* writes in *Shir HaShirim* (1:2), *Tovim do'decha mi'yayin*, "Better is Your love than wine." The *taamei mitzvos*, reasons underlying the *mitzvos*, can be compared to sweet-tasting wine. The *gematria* (numerical equivalent) of *yayin*, wine, is seventy – the same as that for the word *sode*, secret. The analogy is that the secrets of the Torah are intoxicating. Nonetheless, the driving force behind *mitzvah* observance must be the devotion to fulfill Hashem's commands. Nadav and Avihu clearly had sublime reasons for bringing their own fire and incense offering. Notwithstanding the quality of their rationale, they were not responding to Hashem's command. Thus, they were punished despite their pure intentions. Bottom line, they were not commanded.

The *Sefas Emes* explains that it was not just Nadav's and Avihu's shortcomings that catalyzed their error. It was also **our** fault – our spiritual failure – and for this we mourn. **We** catalyzed their tragic deaths. Their intuitive understanding of Hashem's Will went beyond an intellectual level. They had achieved a level which the nation as a whole had only achieved when they stood at the bottom of *Har Sinai* and declared, *Naaseh v'nishma*, "We will do and we will listen!" At this point, they did not need overt Revelation. They sensed the Heaven Above. Seeing was unnecessary. Thus, they felt that the fires from below, created by man, should bring offerings to Heaven Above. We do not require an open fire revealing the Divine Presence for all to see.

Prior to their sin, Nadav and Avihu had achieved this extremely high level. It was their plan to ultimately lead *Klal Yisrael* on their level – a level of faith achieved by the Jews at *Har Sinai*. Unfortunately, the people remained on this level for a short time – until their role in the Golden Calf debacle. Nadav and Avihu were demanding. They thought **we** could do it. Hashem did not "agree." He told Moshe, *B'kerovai ekadesh, v'al pnei kol ha'am echabeid*, "Through My close ones I shall be sanctified, and before all the people I will be honored" (Ibid. 10:3). *Klal Yisrael's* leadership must be in sync with their followers, and vice versa. Alas, a leader is only as strong as his follower's convictions.

These concluding words of the Torah's narrative have become endemic to tragedy. Every Jew is obliged to mourn the deaths of these Torah giants. The *Zohar HaKadosh* claims that due to our spiritual failing, we must bear responsibility for their deaths. Had we been on the proper spiritual level, we could have followed them. Because we were deficient – they died.

*Sefas Emes* now turns to Aharon *Ha'kohen's* reaction to the sudden deaths of his sons. The Torah relates that his reaction was silence – *va'yidome Aharon*, "Aharon was silent" (Ibid. 10:3). Is this because he was exhibiting incredible self-control and suppressing his true feelings? No! Aharon had the ability to negate himself entirely – body and soul – to Hashem's Will. He was selected for *Kehunah Gedolah*, the High Priesthood, specifically for this reason. His sole desire in life was to perform Hashem's Will. When the tragedy occurred his reaction was non-existent, because Aharon's will was Hashem's Will. They were one and the same. If Hashem wanted this – then, this is how it must be. This is the *madreigah*, level, of *Va'yidome Aharon*, "Aharon was silent." Not only did he not display emotion, but he did not react at all. Complete silence. His acceptance of G-d's Will teaches us that the only way to achieve closeness with Hashem is by carrying out His Will.

We may suggest that this idea may be interpreted in the words *Va'yidome Aharon*, "Aharon was silent." *Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl*, posits that the word *adam*, man, is phonetically connected with *ha'dome*, footstool. Man's lofty endeavor is to be a "footstool" to Hashem. A footstool spares a superior from placing his feet on the earth. Such self-effacement, benevolence and love on man's part to achieve the Will of Hashem through his own free-willed, independent energy – making this his mission in life – reflects the underlying motif of being a *tzelem Elokim*, the image of G-d.

As a *ha'adome*, one exists purely to serve. Silence is a form of subservience, as well as acceptance. *Va'yidome Aharon* reflects the highest ideal of man, the pinnacle of his mission: to serve Hashem wholeheartedly, with his entire being – in such a manner that he becomes cohesive with Hashem. It is a concept I refer to as "spiritual integrity." One need not be the most erudite Torah scholar to possess this quality. One does need to have a sterling character, which manifests itself by living a life that is the paragon of truth. He is neither jealous of anyone, nor does he bear grudges. He neither flatters, nor does he allow any wrong to persist. He immediately makes it right. One such individual was *Rav Yaakov Yosef Herman*. A Torah pioneer who trailblazed the spiritual wasteland that was America at the beginning of the twentieth century, he helped to establish the two major pioneering *yeshivos* of the Lower East Side of New York City. He sent young men to Europe to study in the premier *yeshivos*, and merited to see them return as budding scholars on the way to becoming *gedolei Yisrael*, Torah giants. His impact via his incredible family has continued for generations.

How did he do it? I think it is all expressed in the title of the book written by his daughter, *Rebbetzin Ruchoma Shain, All for the Boss*. *Rav Yaakov Yosef* had a close, personal relationship with Hashem. The Almighty was his Boss to Whom he turned at every free moment of the day. His life revolved around Hashem. In his *hesped*, eulogy, for his mother, *Rebbetzin Chaya Esther Stern*, eldest daughter of *Rav Yaakov Yosef, Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl, Mashgiach* of Yeshivas Kaminitz, *Eretz Yisrael*, related the following dialogue that he had with his grandfather.

*Rav Moshe Aharon* was a young man studying in *Kollel*. He met with his grandfather in Zichron Moshe. His grandfather asked, "Moshe Aharon, where are you going?" The *Mashgiach* answered that he was going to a certain place.

*Rav Yaakov Yosef* asked him, "What is your purpose in going to this place?" *Rav*

*Moshe Aharon* was stymied, "What does Grandfather mean by this question?"

*Rav Yaakov Yosef* clarified his question, "If you feel that by going to this and this place you sanctify Hashem's Name, then you should go. If you have any doubt concerning your ability to pull off a *Kiddush Hashem*, then you should not go!" *Rav Yaakov Yosef* continued, "This is how I conduct my life. Prior to going anywhere, prior to doing anything, I ask myself, "Will this activity increase *kavod Shomayim*, the glory of Heaven? Will it bring honor to the Almighty's Name?" This is what it means to live for the purpose of carrying out the Will of Hashem. When one had lived a

life replete with such spiritual integrity, it is no wonder that he achieved so much success, impacting the lives of Jews for generations to come.