

After the death of Aharon's two sons, when they approached before Hashem, and they died. (16:1)

The *Midrash* cites a number of causes for the premature deaths of Nadav and Avihu. In the final analysis, were they so bad? Could they have been worse than Titus *ha'rasha*, who entered the *Kodesh Ha'kodoshim* and emerged unscathed? **Horav Chaim Moshe Schneider, zl**, explains that apparently the difference lies in the nature of the individual. One's responsibility to answer for his actions is commensurate with his spiritual level. Nadav and Avihu had reached such a high plateau of closeness to the Al-mighty that even the slightest error in judgment was manifest as a grave sin.

Horav Schneider emphasizes the awesome responsibility of *bnei Torah*, whose relationship to Hashem is closer than individuals who have not had the opportunity to study *Torah*. Let us consider as an example two people from similar backgrounds who were separated as teenagers. One devoted himself totally to *Torah* study, while the other chose a more mundane lifestyle. Imagine that each was to perform the simple act of making an incorrect *brachah*. The one who did not learn the laws of *brachos* would probably receive a reward for trying to recite a *brachah*. The scholar, on the other hand, would be punished for not reciting the correct *brachah*. He should have been more proficient in the area of *brachos*!

Many non-observant people today are not responsible for their actions. They are ignorant of the laws of *Shabbos*, as well as their significance to the Jewish People. It is quite possible that a *Torah* scholar who transgresses a simple rabbinic law is more liable than the non-observant Jew who does not observe many laws of the *Torah*. The scholar should have known better, while his non-observant contemporary never had the opportunity to learn.

Once the distinguished *rav* of a community was walking down the street on his way to *shul*. As he was walking, he noticed one of the leading members of the Jewish community coming towards him, the police leading him away in shackles. Not wanting to embarrass the other Jew, the *rav* attempted to cross the street. To his surprise, the Jew had the police take him across the street to come face to face with the *rav*. The prisoner began to berate the *rav*, "See what kind of situation I am in? It is all your fault. You are to blame for my miserable predicament." The *rav*, assuming that the man had lost his mind, tried to calm him down. "Perhaps you are not well. Obviously your ominous future has strained your mind. How can you say that I am the cause of your present situation? Did I tell you to smuggle goods and cheat on the government? How can you blame me

for your sin?" The prisoner looked back at the *rav* with accusing eyes and said, "How many times have I stolen from the government? Did you once bring to my attention the fact that it was wrong? You could have prevented this tragedy by admonishing me. I would have listened. Your indifference caused my downfall. Sure I stole, but you, my dear rabbi, are just as responsible. You could have stopped me, but you did not try. Now I am going to jail. Who knows if I will ever return? My blood and that of my wife and children are on the head of the *rav*!"

This is more than just a powerful story. It compels us to wake up and think about all that takes place in front of our very own eyes--which we attempt to ignore. Turning our heads away from the transgression that goes on in our own backyards does not mitigate the sin. It only serves to make us an accessory to our neighbor's/friend's sin and -- in some cases -- actually responsible for his transgression.

To those who say, "We will not learn, so that we will not be held liable," *Horav* Schneider responds, If this is the punishment for those who devote themselves to *Torah*, can one imagine the onus of guilt carried by the one who refuses to learn, lest he be held liable for the most minor offenses.

We must also consider the converse of this collective responsibility. If we are instrumental in bringing someone back to the fold, if our positive behavior inspires someone to choose an observant lifestyle, then the reward we will receive is boundless.