

And they died before Hashem. (10:2)

When a person renders a decision, he must take into consideration its effect on others, as well as all the ramifications, direct and indirect, present and future, that will result from his decision. Nadav and Avihu did not marry. *Chazal* (*Midrash Rabbah, Vayikra 20:10*) consider them guilty of haughtiness for not marrying. They would say, “Our father is the High Priest;” “Our father’s brother is the king/leader of the nation;” “Our uncle is the *Nasi*, Prince of the tribe of Yehudah.” “We are next in line for the hierarchy of the Priesthood. Is there a woman that is suitable for/worthy of us?” As a result of their decision not to marry, many women remained *agunos*, unmarried, in the individual hope that she might be the lucky girl who marries one of them. According to the *Midrash*, Nadav and Avihu were held responsible for having catalyzed an increase in the number of unmarried women. This must be qualified. Why should they be blamed for what might be considered a ludicrous act on the part of the women?

Horav A. Henach Leibowitz, zl, derives from here that a person will have to answer for the fallout of his actions. We do not live in a vacuum. Our society is close and people often render decisions which affect many lives based upon their actions. Nadav and Avihu made a personal decision concerning their own lives. Why should they be faulted? Obviously, the previous sentence is wrong. They did not have personal lives. As *gedolei Yisrael*, their lives touched upon the lives of others. Their decisions affected others. As long as someone – regardless of how wrong he is – is somehow hurt by my decision, I am held responsible. I cannot simply say, “Who cares what he does? I did not tell him to act so foolishly.” If my actions impact another person, I must think twice before I act.

Interestingly, *Chazal* attribute other laxes in spiritual perfection to Nadav and Avihu, infractions that, on the surface, would suggest greater reason for punishment than catalyzing a woman’s self-imposed *agunah* status. Apparently, their actions bespoke a vestige of haughtiness on their part. Also, by not marrying, they were being *mevatei*, abrogating, the *mitzvah* of *pru’ urvu*, be fruitful and multiply. Those are serious reasons for censure. Yet, they died because they were (unknowingly) the cause of women not marrying. Apparently, we have no idea the pain a woman who is unable to marry experiences. This is true, regardless of whether she has yet to meet her Heavenly-designated match, or she is the innocent victim of a recalcitrant husband who is more concerned with assuaging his dominant ego at the expense of his wife than with the pain he causes to her and their children. Causing a fellow Jew to feel pain, to suffer emotional distress, is a terrible sin which Hashem does not forgive.

This might not be the proper venue to remonstrate about the plight of *agunos*. When it involves Jewish pain, however, no concept of not being the right venue exists. Very few understand the plight of an *agunah*, chained wife, who is unable to continue with life because she is chained to a marriage that, for all intents and purposes, no longer exists, other than in the mind of her intractable husband and the few sick supporters he can garner. The *agunah* suffers; her children, who are the ransom in her captivity, and her family must look on, chin up, and not engage in what

is not their affair. Yet, they must look on as their child withers away before their very eyes. The only hope that keeps them all going forward is the knowledge that Hashem feels her/their pain and He is with her/them every day. He has a plan, and we are all part of it. We must be patient as Hashem allows the plan to play itself out.

Some people – very special people – have hearts that are so huge that they can encompass our pain, people such as *Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl*. He understood and was sensitive to the struggle of the *agunah*. It was during the Six Day War, and Yerushalayim was being shelled. The *Mir Yeshivah*, and people from all over the *Bais Yisrael* neighborhood in which the *yeshivah* is located, took cover in the *yeshivah's* air raid shelter. Jordan kept on shelling, while the *yeshivah* continued learning and *davening*. The shells executed a direct hit against the *yeshivah*. At that moment, the shouts of *Shema Yisrael* could be heard loud and clear. It was precisely at that moment, as everyone's anxiety level peaked, that a woman whose husband had abandoned her years earlier, leaving her an *agunah* with no livelihood and no hope, cried out to Hashem, "*Ribono Shel Olam*, I forgive my husband. I forgive the indignity and humiliation he put me through. I forgive him all the great pain to which he subjected me all of these years. I ask that You, too, forgive us for whatever failures we have."

Rav Chaim, who was in that room together with his *talmidim*, students, explained that it was the *agunah's* plea that superseded even the passionate *tefillos*, prayers and their powerful recital of *Shema Yisrael*. The passionate forgiveness of a woman who was so miserably rejected, yet she was able to be *mevater*, concede and give in, when she had every reason not to, catalyzed the salvation of the *Yeshivah*. Hashem listened to her, and they were all saved.