

Shabbat Spice

PARASHAT SHEMINI



Lessons in Disguise

By Daniella Karimzadeh

In this week's Parsha, Parshat Shemini, Moshe prepares Aharon to take the role of *Kohen Gadol*. These preparations took a total of seven days, and on the eighth day, Aharon was to be anointed the *Kohen Gadol*. This was a very important day for Aharon, and all of *Bnei Yisrael* were ready for this day. Aharon was to give some *Korbanot* (sacrifices), and Hashem was to appear to Aharon. In the midst of this important day, Aharon's two sons, Nadav and Avihu, each started to give a strange *Korban* with fire to Hashem. Hashem did not ask for these strange offerings, and therefore both Nadav and Avihu were killed by the fire.

So many questions arise in response to the deaths of Nadav and Avihu. This was such an important day for their father, Aharon. Why did Hashem have them killed on this day? What was so wrong about the *Korbans* that they brought to Hashem that they were punished with death because of it?

Nadav and Avihu, both *Kobens*, were expected to know better than to bring a *Korban* just for the sake of it. However, on that day when their father was being anointed as a *Kohen Gadol*, both Nadav and Avihu believed that bringing this strange *Korban* with fire in it was the right thing for them to do, even though Hashem never told them to bring such a *Korban*.

Many sources say that one big problem with this was that Nadav and Avihu were trying to teach Moshe something. Moshe was at a much higher spiritual level than both of them, yet Nadav and Avihu made this Halachic decision of bringing this *Korban* (that they were never commanded to do, and they made up on their own) to Hashem. Doing so was, in a way, them trying to teach something new to Moshe, who was their leader and teacher. The Gemara explains that no one should teach a Halacha in front of their Rabbi.

Further, Hashem does everything for a reason. This part of the Parsha taught a huge lesson to *Bnei Yisrael*, who were present at the time of the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, as well as to all of us today. Nadav and Avihu were very smart and spiritual men. They had good intentions. They both wanted to be so close to Hashem, and had such a desire to serve Hashem that they went out of their way to give this extra *Korban*, just to show how much they wanted to serve Hashem. However, they should have known better, as Hashem had never commanded them to bring it. Hashem wanted us to know this story about Nadav and Avihu so we can learn from their mistakes. Even though they did so to try to get closer to Hashem, Nadav and Avihu were never commanded to bring the *Korban*. While everyone has a fire burning inside of them to serve Hashem, one must be able to control their fire, and to serve Hashem appropriately and humbly.

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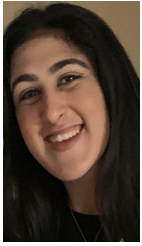
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What Does Aaron's Silence Tell Us?

By Veronica Kordmany

In Parsha Shemini, we read about two specific sacrifices. One of them ended with a blessing, yet the other ended with a condemnation. What's the difference between the two, and what does the aftermath tell us?

The first one couldn't have gone better; it was conducted perfectly. Hashem had given Moses, Aaron, and Aaron's four sons, the laws and commandments of performing sacrificial rituals. After seven days and seven nights, Moses finally initiated the ritual after receiving the command from Hashem. He sent Aaron out to find an animal to serve as the offering, to collect the necessary grains that were included in the sacrifice, and to place them in the altar. In front of all the Children of Israel, by Hashem's decree, Aaron performed the sacrificial ritual. He delivered his offering as was his duty, and then blessed the Children of Israel, raising his hands towards them. In response, from the altar protruded a striking fire that consumed the animal and the grains.

What happened next was the second sacrifice. Aaron had four sons: Abihu, Eleazar, Ithamar, and Nadab. The Chumash describes that this day of unparalleled joy and glee reverted into one of immense tragedy and loss, as fast as it takes to start a fire. Aaron's two elder sons, Nadab and Abihu, did the unthinkable:

וַיִּקְחוּ בְנֵי-אֶהֱרֹן נָדָב וְאַבִּיהוּא אִישׁ מִחֶמְתּוֹ וַיִּתְּנוּ בְהֶן אֵשׁ וַיִּשְׂימוּ עָלֶיהָ קֹטֶרֶת וַיִּקְרִיבוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֵשׁ זָרָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוָּה אֹתָם:

"And Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, each took his pan, put fire in them, and placed incense upon it, and they brought before the Lord foreign fire, which He had not commanded them." (10:1)

There's a lot to unpack here! The first error they made was that they weren't commanded to send an offering; not by Moses, not by Aaron, and especially, not by Hashem. The pair knew that it was a commandment to bring fire and incense every day. So one day, after waiting for Moses to deliver this commandment, Nadab and Abihu took it upon themselves to perform the ritual, skipping the commandment. It may seem insignificant, (after all, isn't it implied after a certain amount of time?), yet there is a lot of power wielded in this concept. Without Hashem's command, the offering was debased as ordinary, unconsecrated. Just like how animals must be consecrated in order to become kosher, as we learn in Parsha Shemini, the offering had to be properly prepared and tended to with strict supervision. The commandment was what made all daily offerings worthy in the eyes of Hashem: to evade this step was, in His eyes, the same as offering something 'unkosher', in a sense.

The second error was the usage of a 'strange fire.' As is written in the Parsha: "Nadab and Abihu, each took his pan, put fire in them, and placed incense upon it, and they brought before the Lord foreign fire." The commentary of the Chumash reveals that Moses hadn't delivered the commandment that day because he was waiting for the Heavenly fire to be sent down. The Rashbam says, "[Moses] wanted the very first incense to be kindled with G-d's own fire, in order to cause a sanctification of G-d's Name." Several Rabbis have commented that since the fire did not originate from the altar, Nadab and Abihu were therefore rendered guilty in using unholy fire for their 'mitzvah'.

(Continued...)

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Had they conferred with Moses about their plans, or had simply waited for the daily commandment to be issued that day, the timeline of events would have been much more optimistic. By writing out the deliberate steps taken in such an erroneous manner, the Parsha is detailing the specifics of what they performed wrong, as if issuing a warning.

After carefully reviewing *how* this tragedy came to be, it's time to look at the reaction. Sadly, many of us have experienced loss at one point or another in our lives. No matter how big or small the loss, the motions of grief are almost always relatively the same. We cry, we feel numb, we sit through *shiva*. But imagine this: Right after experiencing the unfathomable, excruciating pain of losing your *children*, to be commanded not to grieve externally. Sounds impossible, doesn't it?

Aaron, when he eventually found himself in this incomprehensible position, did the impossible. אָהֵרֹן אָמַן: "And Aaron was silent." (10:3) The Chumash says that Aaron was crying loudly until he was approached by Moses. Moses said, "I will be sanctified through those near to Me, and before all the people I will be glorified." And suddenly, silence.

I'll be honest: Out of this whole parsha, this is the only question I have: How did one statement make such a big difference to Aaron?

The purpose of sacrifice wasn't to satiate Hashem's appetite - it was *sanctification*. 'I will be sanctified through those near to Me'; as the forefather of the Children of Israel, it was inherently believed that this statement would apply to Moses.

But as he reveals to Aaron, "I knew that the Tabernacle would be sanctified through someone in whom G-d's glory reposes, but I thought it would be one of us. Now I know that [Nadab and Abihu] were greater than either of us." And this is when the bigger picture of Parsha Shemini is revealed.

The role that Nadab and Abihu played was to serve as a collective sacrifice. It was foretold that Hashem would be sanctified, yet it was never revealed, until now, *who* would serve as this symbolism. Their swift, brutal death was a reminder to the Children of Israel that Hashem was a figure to be both feared and honored. He demands a higher standard of respect and devotion from the Jewish nation than normal figures do; when that standard isn't met, the consequences are potentially life-threatening. At the same time, however, He doesn't do anything coincidentally; meaning, this is happening on a very *happy* day - why would Hashem ruin the festivities, and instead push off the tragedy until another day?

In death, Nadab and Abihu had sanctified Hashem's Name; something that offered consolation to Aaron, who was honored with the mitzvah being specifically bestowed on him. Even on what was possibly the most tragic day of Aaron's life, Hashem had given him a blessing in disguise. As we all know, Hashem's plans for each of us are not always understandable, but always in our best interest.

So, what *does* Aaron's silence tell us? One possible interpretation is that Hashem doesn't put obstacles in our paths that we cannot overcome. Silence is the way in which we discover the hidden blessings that Hashem has planned for us. Another interpretation is that, when we open our mouths, we close our ears to what Hashem is trying to say or do for us. Aaron was told to close his mouth and open his ears; in retribution, he received one of the greatest rewards: A direct blessing from Hashem Himself.

So the next time you go through a difficult time in life, remember not to act impulsively like Nadab and Abihu. Act as Aaron, and let your emotions simmer for a moment. Pay attention to what's happening around you, because Hashem always has a plan.

Shabbat Shalom, and may we receive only good news going forward in life!

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