

## Parshat Shemini 5777

**וַיִּקְחוּ בְנֵי אַהֲרֹן נָדָב וַאֲבִיהוּא אִישׁ מִחַתָּתוֹ וַיִּתְּנוּ בֵּהֶן אֵשׁ וַיִּשִׂימוּ עָלֶיהָ קְטֹרֶת וַיִּקְרִיבוּ לִפְנֵי ה'**  
**אֵשׁ זָרָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוָּה אֹתָם** *And Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, each took his pan, put fire in them, and placed incense upon it, and they brought before the Lord {aish zara} foreign fire, which He had not commanded them.*

**וַיֵּצֵא אֵשׁ מִלִּפְנֵי ה' וַתֹּאכַל אוֹתָם וַיָּמָתוּ לִפְנֵי ה'** *And fire went forth from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.*

**וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל אַהֲרֹן הוּא אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' | לֵאמֹר בְּקִרְבִּי אֶקְדֹּשׁ וְעַל פְּנֵי כָל הָעָם אֶכְבֹּד וַיִּדְּם**  
**אַהֲרֹן** *Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord spoke, [when He said], 'I will be sanctified through those near to Me, and before all the people I will be glorified.' "And Aaron was silent.*

What went wrong is a matter of machlokas in chazal.

The Netziv notes that the posuk mentions Nadav and Avihu as the sons of Aaron first, and then mentions them again by their names independent of their father. He says that this indicates they were originally true sons of Aaron but had since 'moved away' from their father. Similarly in Parshas Vayishlach chazal darshan that the construction of the words 'two of the sons of Yaakov, Shimon and Levi' (Beraishit 34:25) indicate that both sons went to save their sister in the manner they did, despite their fathers protests.

The Netziv further adds that Shimon and Levi had different kavanahs motivating them as indicated by the reference to the 'two' sons. However, Nadav and Avihu had the same intention and motivation.

The 250 men who brought the ketores with Korach were yirei shomayim who despite being denied the Kehuna had such a burning desire to get closer to Hashem, they nevertheless wanted to bring the ketores. The Netziv suggests that the same burning desire to get closer to Hashem was the intention and motivation of both Nadav and Avihu.

The medrash says that Nadav and Avihu were punished because they didn't get married and didn't have children. They also asked when Moshe and

Aaron would die. The Ksav Sofer asks how the Medrash can say this when the Torah clearly states the punishment was for bringing foreign fire (aish zara). The Ksav Sofer answers by pointing to a dilemma Nadav and Avihu thought they had. Their dilemma was as follows:-

Moshe Rabbeinu led the people as an eved Hashem, but had children who didn't become like him. They were 'passed over'. Aaron Hakohen spent time with his children who grew up to be successors to their father, but Aaron had time Moshe didn't have because Aaron was not the people's main leader.

So Nadav and Avihu felt they couldn't do both i.e. be true leaders dedicated 100% to the people and also have good children. The answer, they thought, was not to marry or have children. They made the same calculation/mistake as Chizkiyahu who had a prophesy that if he reproduced he would give birth to a Rosho who would become a future King of Israel and who would lead the people to avoda zarah. Chizkiyahu refrained from having children for many years as a consequence of his nevuah.

However, Chizkiyahu was able to do teshuva due to the mussar he received from Yeshayahu which resulted in Chizkiyahu having children. Nadav and Avihu were so motivated with ahavas Hashem that their burning desire (aish zara) pushed them to make a cheshbon that was not theirs to make. The Netziv says they were therefore punished for not having children to avoid the problem they thought would result from the future death of both Moshe and Aaron.

According to the Netziv, Nadav and Avihu made a mistake. They let their aish zara i.e. the fire of their desire to get closer to Hashem, overreach the cool logic that tells us to follow the wishes of Hashem whether we think we understand them or not.

Note: The word Zar means foreign in modern Hebrew. But we use the same word to refer to someone who oversteps a halachic boundary e.g. someone who is not a Kohen Gadol but who enters the kodosh kodashim on Yom Kippur, is called a Zar.