MIGHT WE BE WHOLE

by Rabbi Label Lam

The sons of Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, each took his fire-pan, they put fire in them and placed incense upon it; and they brought before HASHEM an alien fire that He had not commanded them. A fire came forth from before HASHEM and consumed them, and they died before HASHEM. (Vayikra 10: 1-2)

Do not make your souls abominable by means of any of creeping thing; you shall not make yourselves impure through them lest you make yourselves impure though them. (Vayikra 11:43)

Lest you make yourselves impure through them: If you make yourselves impure through them on earth so I too will make you impure in the World to Come, in the Heavenly Yeshiva. (Rashi)

There are two major themes discussed in Shemini. One has to do with the inauguration of the Tabernacle which tragically concluded with the death of the two sons of Aaron. The other has to do with forbidden foods. What do these seeming strangers have in common? Why are they packaged together?

Antoninus said to Rebbi: The body and the soul have an alibi to free themselves from punishment on the Judgment Day. How so? The body can claim, "The soul is the one that sinned. From the time it left me, I have been lying silent like a rock in the grave." And the soul can say, "It is the body that has sinned. From the day that I left it I have been flying in the air like a bird." Rebbi answered, "Allow me to offer a parable. To what can this be compared? To a king who had a beautiful orchard that contained luscious figs and he posted in it two guards, one lame and the other blind. Said the lame one to the blind one, "I see luscious fruits in the orchard. Come, put me on your shoulders, and together we will pick the figs and eat them." The lame one climbed on the blind one's back, and they picked the figs and ate them. A while later the king, the owner of the orchard found that his figs were gone.

He said to the guards, "What happened to my luscious figs?" Said the lame one, "Do I have feet to take me to the fig trees?" Said the blind one, "Do I have eyes to see where the figs are?" What did the owner do? He placed the lame one on the shoulders of the blind one, and judged them together. So too, on the Day of Judgment, the Holy One Blessed Be He, brings the soul and puts it back into the body and judges them jointly. As it says (Tehillim 50:4) "He will summon the heavens above and the earth, for the trial of His people." "He will summon the heavens above"- this refers to the soul, "and the earth for a trial of His people"- this refers to the body. (Tractate Sanhedrin 91B)

A fundamental question arises from this parable of Rebbe, "Who am I?" Am I my soul? Apparently not! Am I my body? Certainly not! Here we must employ the old Venn-diagram with one circle above overlapping with a circle below. Above is the soul. Below is the body. Together, the overlapping combination of the two produces the actual "I"- the chooser.

Nadav and Avihu rushed in where angels fear to tread driven by an overpowering spiritual lure. It proved deadly. They did what they were not commanded to do and their souls departed as a result. This is a sort of "Frum Yetzer", a compelling spiritual zeal that could be destructive if left to its own devices. A soul needs a body. By the end of our reading this week, we are made to face the realities of living with a body, the lower end of the human spectrum with which we are more likely to be familiar.

Since we are composed of often opposing and many times even warring factions, only with the discipline of a Divine Law with sensitivity to both, can one hope to negotiate and create peace between those heavenly and earthy tendencies! We are cautioned, therefore, in the end not to forget about the delicate and refined nature of the souls we bear as we navigate the physical universe, battling the lowest of urges, and so only together, in a kind of holy collaboration, might we be whole. Text Copyright &copy 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.