

FOOLS RUSH IN WHERE ANGELS FEAR TO TREAD

by Rabbi Label Lam

The sons of Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, each took his fire-pan, they put fire in the them and placed them. A fire came forth from 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)

You shall not make yourselves abominable with any creeping creature that creeps, and you shall not defile yourselves with them, that you should become unclean through them. For I am HASHEM your G-d, and you shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, because I am holy, and you shall not defile yourselves through any creeping creature that crawls on the ground. For I am HASHEM Who has brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your G-d. Thus, you shall be holy, because I am holy. (Vayikra 11:43-45)

What is the connection between these two giant themes? They seem universes apart and unlikely neighbors to be packed by The Creator into the same Torah portion. Maybe they are close because they are so far away from each other. How so?

When the Megilla of Esther wishes to express how wide spread the kingdom of Achashveirosh was we are told he ruled over 127 provinces from Hodu to Kush. The Talmud presents a dispute about the proximity of Hodu and Kush. One opinion is that they were from one end of the world to the other. The other says they were right next to each other. How does that approach make sense? Which opinion is true?

I heard an explanation that they were juxtaposed and contiguous but if you measure around the world in the other direction they were at the extreme ends of the world one from the other.

Here we have a case of Nadav and Avihu, two holy brothers, sons on Aaron the Kohain, rushing into a realm of holiness, at a time of extreme spiritual elevation, but without with permission. They died on the spot. On the other end of the spectrum we find strict instructions about which animals we are and are not allowed to eat.

From the loftiest levels of holiness to the most physical and animalistic appetite we are expected to navigate and proceed with precise rules. There is no room for extremism in either domain. Every move is carefully calibrated.

You might think extreme zealousness is tolerable and praiseworthy in spiritual matters but in truth

the exposed wires are highly and dangerously charged there. You also might think there is an excuse when the blood of passion is rushing through our veins. However, there too we are warned strongly to slow down and proceed with extreme caution.

Maybe for this reason we pray every evening that HASHEM should remove the opposing force from in front of us and in back of us. In front of us is easier to understand but what harm can this negative force afflict from behind us?!

Getting too holy too quickly is as dangerous as yielding to raw animalism. Both are departures from true holiness. In either case life is filled with highly charged electric wires and we must navigate cautiously. Food is unavoidable. Spirituality is inevitable. I would feel comfortable changing a light bulb but not a fixture. I tried once and suddenly all the lights in the house went out. I feel fortunate my beard was not burnt off or worse. Now I defer to an expert, a licensed electrician because **fools rush in where angels fear to tread.**