

CLEAVE TO YOUR FRIENDS

by Shlomo Katz

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**This issue is dedicated in memory of Mr. Abe Spector Avraham ben Natan
Nata a"h, a devoted friend and supporter of Hamaayan.**

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Shemini

We are now in the midst of Sefirat Ha'omer/The Counting of the Omer, during which we observe certain forms of mourning for 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva who died during this part of the year. Chazal teach that they died because they did not show proper respect to each other.

Why were these students deserving of death and why did they die at this time of the year? R' Aharon Kotler z"l (died 1962) explains:

R' Akiva was a crucial figure in the transmission of the Oral Law. [Ed. Note: The gemara teaches that most anonymous mishnayot and many anonymous midrashim may be attributed to certain students of R' Akiva and follow the halachic viewpoint of R' Akiva.] It was reasonable to expect of R' Akiva's students that they too be worthy of transmitting the Oral Law. By not treating each other with respect, they proved themselves to be unworthy of being R' Akiva's heirs, and, having failed in their lives' missions, they died.

Why did their failure to treat each other with respect render them unfit to transmit the Torah? Because we learn in Pirkei Avot that there are 48 prerequisites to acquiring the Torah. One of these, which those students were lacking, is "cleaving to friends." Of course, if R' Akiva's students could not acquire the Torah because of this failing, they could not transmit it to the next generation either.

Why did they die at this time of the year? R' Kotler explains that the period between Pesach and Shavuot is a time of preparing to receive the Torah. Those students, however, were not preparing to receive the Torah, they were acting in a manner inconsistent with receiving the Torah.

(Mishnat R' Aharon Vol. III p.17)

An Astonishing Midrash

When Nadav and Avihu died, the Yam Suf/Red Sea began to cry that it never should have split for Bnei Yisrael. The angels answered the Sea with the verse (Eichah 5:21), "Renew our days as before."

Chazal say that when Aharon made the golden calf, Hashem decreed that all of Aharon's sons would die. Thanks to Moshe's prayers, half of the decree was rescinded, and only two of Aharon's sons died.

Why did the older two sons die and not the younger two? Apparently because the older sons were considered to be closer to Hashem. Thus we read (Vayikra 10:3), "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me."

When the Sea heard that the older sons were considered to be closer to Hashem than the younger sons, the Sea said, "I am older than mankind, for I was created on the second day and mankind was created on the sixth day. Therefore, I am closer to Hashem and I should not have split for the Jewish people."

The angels answered, "'Renew our days as before' - i.e., before creation. Hashem 'thought' about creating the Jewish people even before the world was created. Therefore, they are 'older'."

Another explanation: The Yam Suf initially had refused to split for Bnei Yisrael because they had been idolaters in Egypt. Hashem explained, however, that they had been so against their will. In their hearts, they had served only Hashem.

When Aharon's sons died, the Sea assumed that Aharon was being punished for the golden calf which he had made. Yet Aharon had not intended to sin; certainly he had not intended the calf to be an idol! Seeing that Aharon was punished despite his good intentions, the Sea claimed that it should not have split for Bnei Yisrael.

Why was the Sea wrong? Because Nadav and Avihu did not die as a punishment for Aharon. Rather, they died because they were too holy for this world, as the Torah says (10:3), "I will be sanctified through those who are nearest to Me." [Ed. Note: The Torah does not say that they sinned.] This is what the angels meant when they answered the Sea with the verse, "Renew our days as before" - the souls of Nadav and Avihu were as pure in life as they had been in the days before they were born, when they resided in heaven with Hashem.

(Binat Nevonim)

"It happened on the eighth day . . ." (9:1)

The gemara (Megillah 10b) states that the day on which the mishkan/tabernacle was dedicated was as joyous for Hashem as the day on which Hashem created the world. R' Shlomo Ganzfried z"l (author of Kitzur Shulchan Aruch) explains this as follows:

Hashem's purpose in creating the world was so that He could reside amongst His creations. And, before Adam's sin, Hashem did just that. However, when Adam sinned, he drove Hashem to ascend to the lowest of the seven heavens. When Kayin sinned, Hashem ascended higher still, and so on due to the sins of the generation of Enosh, the generation of the flood, the generation of the Tower of Bavel, the S'domites, and the Egyptians. In all, Hashem ascended to the seventh heaven.

The mishkan was built so that Hashem could again reside amongst men, as the Torah states (Shemot 25:8): "They will build Me a mishkan so that I may reside amongst them." Thus, the day on which the mishkan/tabernacle was dedicated was as joyous for Hashem as the day on which Hashem created the world.

(Apiryon)

"The sons of Aharon - Nadav and Avihu - each took his pan, and they placed incense in it, and they brought before Hashem a foreign fire which He had not commanded." (10:1)

There is an opinion among the Sages that the sin of Nadav and Avihu was that they paskened/issued a halachic ruling in the presence of their teacher Moshe. R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (19th century) writes that this verse confirms that view. How so?

Strictly speaking, there was nothing wrong with bringing fire into the mishkan/tabernacle. And, it is human nature that when one knows that an action is permitted, he does that action without asking a rabbi if he may. Generally, such behavior is acceptable.

However, when one is in close proximity to Hashem, Who is humble, one must be humble as well. Accordingly, it was wrong for Nadav and Avihu to do even that which was obviously permitted without asking Moshe. This is alluded to in the words, "[T]hey brought before Hashem a foreign fire." Only because they were in the mishkan, "before Hashem," was their behavior wrong.

R' Kluger adds: Hashem is different from a human dignitary. When one gives a gift to a human dignitary, the recipient does not care whether the gift is given legally or whether, for example, the gift is stolen goods. Not so Hashem, Who does not accept as sacrifices animals that were stolen. Indeed, Hashem does not accept any mitzvah that is intertwined with a sin.

This is another reason why the verse points out that Nadav and Avihu brought the foreign fire "before Hashem." A human king might have accepted Nadav and Avihu's fire even though they neglected to ask Moshe's permission to sacrifice it. However, Hashem rejected their sacrifice because they did not obtain Moshe's permission.

(Imrei Shefer)

R' Levi Krupenia z"l

Last week marked thirty days since the passing of R' Levi Krupenia, rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Toras Emes-Kamenitz in Brooklyn. R' Krupenia was 84 years old.

R' Krupenia was born in Slonim, Russia, and studied in the Mirrer Yeshiva. With that yeshiva, he spent the World War II years in Shanghai and became close to the mashgiach/dean of students, R' Chatzkel Levenstein. After the war, R' Krupenia taught at Yeshivat Bais Hatalmud in New York. He also became a son-in-law of R' Reuven Grozovsky. (The latter's father-in-law was R' Baruch Ber Leibowitz, head of the Kamenitz Yeshiva in Lithuania.)

In the early 1960's Rav Krupenia became the rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Toras Emes-Kamenitz. Later, he began to divide his time between Brooklyn and a branch of the yeshiva in Woodbridge (in the Catskills).

R' Shaul Kagan z"l

This week also marks thirty days since the passing of R' Shaul Kagan, founder of the Kollel of

Pittsburgh. R' Kagan was 62 years old.

He was born in Europe. After his family fled to the U.S., his father became rosh yeshiva of Yeshiva Rabbenu Yaakov Yosef (RJJ). R' Shaul studied there and later enrolled in the fledgling yeshiva in Lakewood under R' Aharon Kotler.

Almost 20 years ago, R' Kagan established a kollel (institute for advanced study by married men) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He began with ten men who studied and taught classes (for free) to the community. An appreciation of the Kiddush Hashem that he and his kollel made on the city of Pittsburgh may be gleaned from a comment made once by the non-Jewish, then-Pittsburgh Mayor Richard Caligari, "What those ten men are doing day and night in that study hall on Bartlett Street is giving hope and strength for Russian Jews far across the globe." Asked later why he would make such a comment, the Mayor said, "Rabbi Kagan told me a little bit about the Torah. Then he explained what you rabbis do. Then he took me to the kollel. I saw from the way that he talked about your Torah and by seeing you study that whatever the Torah does, it must impact much farther than Pittsburgh." (Both of these articles are based on Yated Ne'eman, March 2)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.
