

FRIENDS

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

"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 G-d an alien fire that He had not commanded them. A fire came forth from before G-d and consumed them, and they died before G-d." (Vayikra/Leviticus 10:1-2) At this moment of great intimacy between G-d and the Jewish Nation, they were, Rashbam (1) explains, motivated to bring the daily incense that Moshe had not yet told anyone to bring. They were unaware that Moshe was waiting for a Heavenly Fire to descend and consume the incense, to have an even greater sanctification of the Divine Name. How could two so righteous individuals have made such a tragic miscalculation?

The Medrash Yalkut Shimoni (#524) expounds that "each took his fire pan" indicates that each took his on his own without consulting one another. Each thought they were fulfilling G-d's will with this bold step. As people of great spiritual measure - as Moshe consoled his brother, "Of this did G-d speak, saying 'I will be sanctified by those nearest to me...' (v.3) - they must have given the act great forethought. How would consultation have altered the result? After great contemplation they both came to the same conclusion that it was a great act of piety to bring this alien fire. Would not that conclusion have been further solidified had they consulted with one another?

Rabbi Alter Henach Leibowitz (2) explains that the give and take of conversation is not merely an opportunity to confirm previously determined rationales. Rather, the reduction of thoughts and emotions to clear, concise expressions and the verbalization of one's reasoning and justification compels one to delve deeper into the issue until he discovers the core truth.

Indeed, Pirkei Avos (Ethics of the Fathers, 6:6) states that one of the forty-eight essential qualities for acquisition of Torah is "friends attentive to detail". Generally, this is thought of as referring to friends who will correct errors. But from our situation, concludes Rabbi Leibowitz, we comprehend another facet. When one has a friend with whom he can share and discuss his thoughts, the friend's attention to detail will oblige the speaker to clarify the issues and arrive at the truth.

Have a Good Shabbos!

(1) Rabbi Shlomo ben Meir; 1085-1174; grandson of Rashi and brother of Rabbeinu Tam, he was a leading Tosafist and Talmudic commentator

(2) Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim of Kew Gardens Hills, New York, in Chidushei HaLev, the compilation of his discourses

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