

PAIN AND PURPOSE

by Mordechai Dixler

The Torah readings of the past two months described in great detail the construction and the sacrificial services in the Tabernacle, the House of G-d. This week's reading brings us to the culmination: it opens with the inaugural services, and G-d's miraculous fire consuming the first offering.

The Jewish nation's excitement was short-lived, however, as tragedy soon darkened the celebration. Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon the High Priest, brought an offering of their own making, and their lives were taken suddenly before all the assembled.

Their father Aharon's reaction was "V'yidom – he went silent. (Lev. 10:3)" His own children suddenly passed away, turning the inaugural day of the Tabernacle into one of personal sadness, but Aharon controlled his fatherly reaction, showing no emotion.

It's difficult to understand how Aharon could show such restraint in the face of such pain. Consider, also, that the Sages famously describe Aharon as "Oheiv Es HaBriyos Umikarvan Latorah – He would draw people to Torah out of his pure love for them." If he had such a high level of love for strangers, one could only imagine the love he had for his own flesh and blood.

In response to the tragedy, Moshe, Aharon's brother, says to him, "This is what G-d meant when He said 'I will be sanctified by those close to Me, and before the whole nation I will be honored.(ibid.)" In these words Aharon found his strength. Losing his precious children was painful, but he understood the purpose of the tragedy. Nadav and Avihu were taken because they were "close to Me," G-d said, and sanctified and honored Him.

Even with this understanding, Aharon's reaction still seems above and beyond our understanding. He was clearly a spiritual giant, and we cannot even begin to relate to his superhuman fortitude. At the same time, Aharon's consolation teaches us where to find strength in times of difficulty. We, too, must consider the purpose of what happened to us, and try to find what greater good has been served. Of course, there are times when finding that purpose is challenging. At those times, perhaps we can create one by teaching or giving comfort to others. This is Aharon's lesson for times of pain.

May our actions and reactions to difficulties also serve to bring sanctity and honor to G-d's name!