

NADAV AND AVIHU: THE INSIDE STORY

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

Then, a fire came out from before G-d and consumed the Burnt-Offering and the fat on the altar, while the people watched. They cried out in praise and fell on their faces. (Vayikra 9:24)

Climax of climaxes. This is what it is all about ... what it all comes down to, or, rather, UP to. Life is about being inspired and inspiring. It is about being spiritually, intellectually, and emotionally stirred up to the point that one wants to shout out praise of G-d. Whether it comes from receiving a unexpected bonus on a paycheck, standing atop the highest mountain and beholding a breath-taking view, or, reaching a sublime quiet moment in the midst of prayer -- it is all the same: bursts of excitement meant to be channeled in the direction of G-d.

Praise comes in many different shapes and sizes. It can simply be a "thank G-d," or, it can be an elaborate set of prose like Dovid HaMelech composed. It can just be the way a person acts, when the person acts in a way that reflects the way of G-d, like Pinchas son of Elazar in the Torah. In fact, very little inspires people more than seeing others perform sincere acts of self-sacrifice, and, when those acts are performed for someone else, then, people who see them think highly of the reason for such self-sacrifice.

Now, of course, G-d does NOT need our praise; He needs NOTHING at all. He is perfect, and has more than enough self-confidence and belief in what He does to be above our praise. Just like sacrifices in general, we do it to rectify ourselves and the world, not G-d.

This is the reason for the following remarkable statement:

The Holy One, Blessed is He, was about to make [King] Chizkiah the Moshiach and Sennecheriv [who attacked Jerusalem], Gog and Magog, when the Attribute of Judgment said before The Holy One, Blessed is He, "Master of the Universe! Dovid, the king of Israel, who recited many songs and praises, You did not make Moshiach. Chizkiah, for whom You have performed great miracles, and for which he did NOT recite song, You want to make Moshiach?" (Sanhedrin 94a)

Of all the things that one might guess could stand in the way of Moshiach's arrival, praise of G-d for miracles would not be one of them. And, besides, just because one man forgot to adequately say "thank you" after a great miracle occurred for him, a whole generation -- and the rest of history for

that matter -- had to suffer?

Yes, for two reasons. The first reason is because a leader, especially a Jewish leader, is representative of the entire nation, and just as he is inspired by his people, his people are inspired by him. And that is true of a national leader, a community leader, and even a family leader.

Secondly, nothing, historically, ever happens in a vacuum. If Chizkiah missed the mark as far as praising G-d for the miraculous victory of Sennecheriv, then, there was something lacking from his entire generation, which, the Talmud says, was praiseworthy in so many other ways. In fact, they have gone downhill ever since his time.

Still, why is praise of G-d such an important key to redemption, be it national or personal?

Because, if you think of it, very little reveals our own "hisbatlus" -- self-cancellation -- than our ability to praise others. Usually, when we are self-consumed and focussed inwardly, we have difficulty seeing the praiseworthiness of others, and, feel unable to muster the energy to praise them. It is hard to praise others on the "outside" when we live totally on the "inside."

Thus, praising others, and especially G-d, reveals just how much we are able to get out of ourselves and be objective, the goal of life. It is then, and only then, that we can become fitting conduits for the light of G-d, the true goal of life and success of a person.

Shabbos Day:

Nadav and Avihu, sons of Aharon, took their incense pans and put fire and incense in them, and offered an unauthorized fire before G-d, which He did not command them to do. A fire went out from before G-d and burned them up, and they died before G-d. (Vayikra 10:1-2)

The story of Nadav and Avihu is one of the all-time Torah tragedies. Two rising stars cut down in their prime, at the height of one of history's greatest celebrations. The fall from glory, for Nadav and Avihu and the entire Jewish nation was swift and stunning, and we've never recovered.

The Talmud and Kabbalah cite various different factors that contributed to the catastrophic moment. There was, of course, their unauthorized incense-offering as mentioned in the verse. There was, also, their sin of looking at the Divine Presence on top of Mt. Sinai all the way back at the end of Parashas Mishpatim, and, as the Talmud says, their grave sin of teaching law while in the presence of their master, Moshe.

As well, it says that when Aharon HaKohen, Nadav and Avihu's father, assisted in the creation of the golden calf, all of his sons were supposed to die as a punishment. However, Moshe Rabbeinu prayed on his behalf and was able to reduce the punishment to only two sons, which Nadav and

Avihu became as a result of their other sins.

But, as the Arizal reveals in Sha'ar HaGilgulim (Chapter 33), the story of Nadav and Avihu is a big one, one that goes far beyond -- in both directions in time -- than the few possukim allotted here in this week's parashah. And, it is another excellent example of how, without Sod, it is very hard, if not impossible, to assemble a complete picture of what is really being taught, as we shall now discuss.

The Arizal teaches:

"Later on, Nadav and Avihu also came from the good side of Kayin, and this is the sod of 'the firstborn Nadav and Avihu' (Bamidbar 3:2). On this the Zohar in Parashas Acharei Mos asks: It should have said "v'Elazar" ("the firstborn Nadav and Avihu, Elazar"), with a 'vav.' Thus, it is an allusion, for, Kayin was the firstborn of Adam HaRishon, the firstborn of history, and he reincarnated into Nadav and Avihu ..."

So, the story of Nadav and Avihu begins way back in time, at least it does for their souls. And, even though Kayin was the first murderer ever, and, as evil and selfish as he seems to have been, still, there was a "good side" to him, and that went to Nadav and Avihu.

"However, Nadav only had his Ruach from the level of Kayin, which is the sod of the posuk, 'With Your generous spirit (ruach nedivah) sustain me' (Tehillim 51:14). His Nefesh came from his elder, Aminadav father of Elisheva his mother, and thus, he took the last three letters (nun-dalet-bais): Nadav. However, with respect to Avihu, both his Nefesh and Ruach were from Kayin, and that is why he is called 'Avihu' ('he is my father'), to indicate that all of his levels were from Kayin, who received the Nefesh from Adam himself, the 'father of the entire world.' This is the meaning of 'Avihu'- he is from Adam, the 'father of the entire world'."

Thus, we see a distinction between the two brothers, though, normally, they are seen as two parts of one whole.

"This is the sod of, 'We are unclean for the soul of man (nefesh adam)' (Bamidbar 9:7), which were Nadav and Avihu, the Nefesh of Adam HaRishon himself. However, since Nadav did not have the Nefesh of Adam, it does not say 'Nefashos Adam' in the plural, for, the main Nefesh of Adam was only in Avihu."

The distinction of Avihu went even further:

"Avihu also took from Nachson, the brother of his mother, because he was also from the root of Kayin, called 'Nefesh' ... Since they were on the level of Nefesh called 'Asiyah,' the zuhama of the snake attached itself to them, and they sinned in the incident of the unauthorized Incense-Offering (Vayikra 10:1). As a result, they were punished and they died."

In other words, tracing back the root of the souls of Nadav and Avihu, we find that they come from the lowest world, the world closest to the "K'lipos," the Negative Forces in creation. Therefore, there

was an inherent spiritual vulnerability in Nadav and Avihu, one that was triggered by the event of their day, but, which was rooted far back in time.

The sin, having been committed and death having occurred, tikun became necessary.

"Eliyahu HaNavi is Pinchas, which is the Nefesh "Zehira Ila'a" of Adam. Therefore, Nadav and Avihu came into him b'ibur in the incident with Zimri, since they were also the level of the Nefesh of Adam from the side of the Nefesh of Asiyah, as we mentioned earlier."

As we have mentioned in the past, there are two types of reincarnations. The typical reincarnation is when a soul is born into a new body after having lived in a previous life(s). This happens only at birth, and that soul becomes the main soul for that body for its entire lifetime.

The second type of "reincarnation" is more subtle, and happens during a person's life time. In other words, it is possible to spiritually "inherit" an additional soul while one is perfectly alive and even quite conscious. This is usually the soul of a righteous person to help a well-meaning individual accomplish more than he might normally be capable of achieving, or, the soul of an evil person to "help" an evil person "evil" himself out of existence.

This type of reincarnation is called "ibur" (impregnation) because the additional soul spiritually "impregnates" the person, so-to-speak, providing him with an extra spiritual lift. As a result, it never becomes the main soul of the person, and, it can leave the person just as fast as it came. Or, it, or even they (there can be up to THREE such additions) can stay around for a while, as in the case of Pinchas and the ibur of Nadav and Avihu.

We'll continue with the odyssey of the souls of Nadav and Avihu at Seudos Shlishis. (Peeking now is cheating, but understandable.)

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

And all your brothers the entire House of Israel shall cry over the burning. (Vayikra 10:6)

Nadav and Avihu, Part Two.

The Arizal continues:

"Now, had the Jewish people not sinned with the (golden) calf, then, the zuhama would have been completely removed from them. And, had that been the case, then, even though Nadav and Avihu sinned with the incense, they could have simply died a normal death. However, since Israel did commit the sin with the calf, they caused the zuhama to once again adhere to the Nefesh of Adam. As a result, Nadav and Avihu had to die through burning. This is the reason for, 'And all your brothers the entire House of Israel shall cry over the burning' (Vayikra 10:6): their sin of the calf caused the

burning of the Nefesh of Adam HaRishon, the 'father of the entire world.' And, this is the reason why Nadav and Avihu were considered 'equal' to the entire Jewish people, like Moshe and Aharon, for, they had possessed the Nefesh of Adam HaRishon itself."

Thus, this is the explanation of the famous midrash that says Moshe considered Nadav and Avihu to be greater than even he and Aharon HaKohen (Vayikra Rabbah 12:2), and which Rashi quotes (10:3). This midrash, in spite of the explanations, has always been hard to understand, given the sins that Nadav and Avihu committed, and the punishment they warranted.

However, as the Arizal explains, it has to do with the source of their souls; that is the source of their greatness. You see, Moshe's vision, as we saw in Egypt when he killed the Egyptian, went beyond the immediate moment, but, incorporated the past and the future. The incident in this week's parshah revealed to him all kinds of deep secrets about world tikun, and the role his nephews played in it. Perhaps this is why Aharon was able to remain "quiet" after the incident.

There are more hints to the Pinchas-Nadav and Avihu connection:

"Regarding the ibur into Pinchas, it is written, 'Remember, please (nun-aleph), which innocent (nun-kuf-yud) person ever perished' (Iyov 4:7), as the Zohar says (Pinchas 217a). For, the first letters of Nadav and Avihu are 'nun-aleph,' and they are from the root of Kayin, whose letters spell 'nun-kuf-yud.' In other words, they never perished, but went into Pinchas, who was also from Kayin. However, as we explained earlier, when Pinchas sinned with the incident of the daughter of Yiftach, the ibur of Nadav and Avihu was removed from him, and it went to Shmuel HaNavi."

Thus, Pinchas maintained his "hold" on the additional souls of Nadav and Avihu for many years, until the incident of Yiftach (Shoftim 11:34). Yiftach unwittingly had made a vow that disallowed his daughter to marry, in order to praise G-d for his miraculous victory. His vow backfired, because he had never intended to include his daughter in that which he would sanctify to Heaven.

Nevertheless, there had been a solution to the predicament: annulment. According to Chazal, had Yiftach gone to Pinchas, or, Pinchas to Yiftach, the vow could have been annulled. Yet, neither budged, and, Yiftach's daughter fell through the cracks and remained single the rest of her life, and suffered as a result.

Thus, both leaders were punished. Yiftach's limbs fell off slowly, and Pinchas lost the ibur of Nadav and Avihu. This greatly affected his spiritual stature, for, it seems, wherever the souls of Nadav and Avihu went, there was great spiritual benefit:

"... This is also the sod of 'Moshe and Aharon were among His priests, and Shmuel among those who invoke His Name' (Tehillim 99:6), for, Shmuel was equal to Moshe and Aharon (Brochos 31b). This is because Nadav and Avihu were in him, and they were equal to Moshe and Aharon, as they say on the posuk, 'It shall be sanctified by My Glory' (Shemos 29:43) ... And, just as Elisha took the three letters 'aleph-lamed-yud' from Elihu, as we said in the previous discussion, so, too, did Shmuel take

the two letters 'aleph-lamed' from Eliyahu, to allude to the fact that he took Nadav and Avihu, who, originally, were in Eliyahu."

This is by far not the end of the story of the souls of Nadav and Avihu. We didn't even mention how their souls were rectified at Mt. Carmel when the nation fell on their faces and said, "Hashem is Elokim," after the miracle of Eliyahu. They did this when the Divine Presence came down and miraculously lapped up the water and burned the drenched wood and sacrifice, to avoid looking at It, the opposite of what Nadav and Avihu did on Mt. Sinai.

But, at least we have seen how, through the prism of Sod, difficult questions can be answered and two seemingly unimportant characters on the stage of history have far more prominence than Pshat is willing to divulge.

MELAVE MALKAH:

A Maskil by Assaf, Give ear, my nation, to my Torah; Bend your ear to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth with a parable, I will utter riddles from ancient times ... (Tehillim 78:1)

The Talmud says that any psalm that begins with the word "Maskil" -- which comes from the word that means enlightenment -- was made public and explained to the entire people by a skilled interpreter and orator (Pesachim 117a). This, if course, meant the message was seminal to the survival of the Jewish people and Torah tradition.

This psalm is both long and short. It is long in as much as it has 72 possukim, many more than most psalms in Tehillim. However, given that it is a veritable overview of Jewish history -- spanning more than four hundred years from the slavery in Egypt to the reign of King David -- it is quite short.

What is the point of such an overview? The point is not so much a historical overview, but, a Hashgochah Pratis -- Divine Providence -- overview. It is to show how all events, and far and varied as they may have been, were in order to lead to the rulership of Dovid HaMelech:

He despised the tent of Yoseph the tribe of Ephraim He did not choose; but chose the tribe of Yehudah, Har Tzion which He loves. (67-68)

The same thing, of course, applies to his descendant, Moshiach ben Dovid. If all events from the slavery in Egypt until the rulership of Dovid HaMelech were in order to establish his kingdom, how much more so is this true of the eventual king of the Jewish people, Moshiach ben Dovid. Even the minutest detail of the seemingly most insignificant life in all of history was to this end.

In fact, "they" say that once prophecy returns in the Days of Moshiach, we will be able to sense what the roles that even blades of grass played in the building of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. "Hester Panim," the "Hiding of G-d's Face, means that most aspects of creation APPEAR to live in

their own worlds, oblivious to the worlds of others, randomly. "Gilui Panim," the "Revealing of G-d's Face," means that it becomes apparent how everything was and is intimately inter-connected, growing in unison according to Divine Plan.

We are now well into the period of the "Omer," which we count each night until the holiday of Shavuot and the time of Torah reception. Torah is, by definition, a revelation of G-d. It is strictly prophecy, dictated by G-d to Moshe Rabbeinu, who had no permission at all to edit even a letter.

One would think, and rightly so, that it should be impossible to look at Torah and NOT see the work of G-d. Yet, we see that not only can people learn Torah and deny its Divine origin, but, that they can even greatly disgrace it. What people have done to Torah (although they have not necessarily gotten away with it), is beyond one's worst dream!

Yet, others look at Torah, and not only see the word of G-d, but, the universes of thought hidden within each letter of Torah. And, the respect they show for Torah is beyond one's idea of what self-sacrifice for a holy cause might normally entail.

What's the difference between the two groups and their radically different outlooks?

Spiritual refinement, which is not to be confused with intellectual greatness. One can be intellectually bright, yet, devoid of spirituality. One can be quite spiritual, yet, not have the highest I.Q. To have both qualities is to have it all, and, often, to become a leader of the Torah world.

Counting the Omer is about spiritual refinement. Prior to Pesach, we annulled all of our chometz, and during Pesach we ate only matzah, straight flour and water. Simplicity, sublime simplicity, like that of the World-to-Come, says the Maharal. A simplicity that means all the physical blinders are removed from our eyes so that we can see behind the scenes, and, the hand of G-d.

In fact, each of the ten plagues was really just the removal of another spiritual veil, unlike the ten statements of creation, which successively added another veil. Creation was made to hide the hand of G-d; the plagues occurred to reveal It. G-d didn't make a plague, He simply removed a veil, and the plague was the net result of doing so.

That's OUR job. Our "melachah" is to reveal the hand of G-d in creation, by revealing it first within ourselves. Like the souls of Nadav and Avihu, there is a lot of history to all of us, and, by getting in touch with it, either in a general or particular way, we refine ourselves and place ourselves in a better position to connect up with the rest of creation and the purpose of life.

Have a great Shabbos,
Pinchas Winston