

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

G-d became very angry with Aharon to destroy him. (Devarim 9:20)

The account of the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, who brought the unauthorized Incense-Offering (Vayikra 10:1), appears a few times in the Torah, for one reason or another. Furthermore, when the Talmud tries to pinpoint the reason for the severity of their Divine punishment, it usually refers to something the sons of Aharon did on their own to make them worthy of death.

However, the posuk above is also a reference to the death of Aharon's two eldest sons, albeit an indirect one. Furthermore, it offers another explanation for why they had to die and this time, it had nothing to do with Nadav and Avihu themselves, but the sin of the father instead:

BECAME VERY ANGRY WITH AHARON: Because he listened to them. TO DESTROY HIM: This means to destroy the sons. (Rashi)

This also begs the question: do sons die for the sin of the fathers? Only when the sons continue on with the actual sin of their father, but not if they break the cycle or perform a different sin altogether.

However, what was Aharon's great sin? Rashi explains: he listened to the people and allowed the construction of the golden calf. In other words, as the Sifsei Chachamim explains, he was not held accountable for the calf itself, which popped out by itself from the oven, bleating and moving about on its own (Pirkei d'Rebi Eliezer, 45). In fact, Aharon had merely suggested the collection of jewelry as a stall tactic; it was Bilaam's sons, Yanu and Yambrus, two Egyptian sorcerers, with the help of Michah, who had caused the melted materials to produce the calf.

If so, how does the punishment - the death of four sons, which would have been the case had Moshe's prayers not interceded, fit the crime?

According to the Tifferes Tzion, because Aharon was such a righteous person, and G-d deals with his close ones with great exactitude, the punishment was far more severe for Aharon than it would have been for someone of far lesser spiritual stature. However, true as this may be, it only explains the severity of the Divine response as far as Aharon HaKohen himself was concerned; it does not explain why his sons had to fall for his error.

Therefore, the sins of Nadav and Avihu themselves, which included looking at the Divine Presence on Mt. Sinai, not marrying, being overly anxious to replace Moshe and Aharon as leaders of the Jewish people, and of course, bringing the unauthorized offering on the eighth day of the dedication of the Mishkan - all had to have played a major role in their own demise. Though, however true that may be, it still defies a connection between Aharon's sin and their own.

Hence, something deeper must have been taking place at the time. Indeed, as usual, the Arizal fills in the gap.

Shabbos Day:

Haran died before Terach his father did in his birthplace, Ur Kasdim. (Bereishis 11:28)

"As we have said, Aharon was Haran (whose name, Heh-raish-nun are the last three letters of 'Aharon'), the nephew of Avram. Now, Haran himself had come to rectify the sin of Adam HaRishon who had performed idol-worship. However, not only did he not rectify, but he didn't believe in G-d until after Avraham came out of the fiery furnace, as Chazal say: Therefore, Haran burned in Ur Kasdim."

This is referring to the test when Nimrod threatened to burn Avraham alive in Kasdim if he didn't relinquish his belief in G-d and worship Nimrod instead. Of course, Avraham never even considered the possibility, and instead entered the furnace to sanctify the Name of G-d. However, Haran, his nephew, had not been such a big believer and waited for results before making his own personal decision.

What Haran didn't realize, was that self-sacrifice (mesiros nefesh) for G-d only works when you don't expect a miracle. Then, not only is it called 'mesiros nefesh,' but it also becomes worthy of a miracle. Moreover, one is not supposed to rely upon miracles in the first place (Shabbos 32a), but rather trust in G-d that everything will work out for the best in the long run (and maybe even in the short run).

As a result, though Avraham emerged after three days in the fiery furnace unscathed, Haran met with the exact opposite fate. His lack of belief in G-d originally, and then his subsequent death when he tried to prove otherwise, resulted in a tremendous profanation of G-d's Name in the end, unlike his uncle Avraham.

Therefore,

"After that, he [Haran] reincarnated into Aharon to rectify the sin, but in the end he did just the opposite by making the calf. Really, he (Aharon) should have instead sacrificed himself when the Erev Rav came to him and said, 'Arise and make a god for us.' (Shemos 32:1) However, he erred, thinking that it was enough that they had already killed Chur, who was also from the root of Hevel."

Talk about mob scenes. Moshe Rabbeinu had been late coming down the mountain, or so the nation had thought. They suspected that he had died, for whatever reason, on the mountain. Now they were leaderless and without direction, in the middle of a desert that surely spelled their own demise. Into this spiritual void flew the Erev Rav, who have always been masters at taking advantage of other people's ignorance and insecurities.

What followed was rambunctious-ness and licentiousness. Chur, the son of Miriam, and the nephew of Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon HaKohen, pulled a Pinchas-action by stepping in to halt the mutiny. However, he did not meet with a similar fate as Pinchas, and to the utter shock of all those who were there, was murdered by those who wanted to keep going in the wrong direction.

Aharon noted this and suspected that he might suffer a similar fate if he stood in the way of their regression:

"This is the sod of, 'And (he) built an altar before him' (Shemos 32:5), which Chazal interpret to mean: he built an altar from the slaughtered before him, that is, Chur."

However, unlike Chur, Aharon was the Kohen Gadol. Furthermore, Mt. Sinai had the status of the Temple, and murdering the Kohen Gadol in the Temple is crime for which there can be no forgiveness. Therefore, to protect the people from this hideous sin, Aharon set about stalling for time. However,

"He didn't stop them and sacrifice himself instead, and thus, sinned as a result." (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 33)

The incident with the calf was, pardon the pun, a golden opportunity to rectify the sin of Haran, who was supposed to have rectified the sin of none other than Adam HaRishon himself. Unfortunately it was missed, and as Rav Chaim Vital concludes, "This was not rectified until Uriah HaKohen."

So, as Rashi says, Aharon was punishable for having listened to the people regarding the building of the golden calf. However, what made this sin so serious was the fact that it was Aharon's main opportunity to rectify a long-standing sin of Adam HaRishon. And, considering that the Arizal states elsewhere that the sin of the golden calf was a duplication of the sin of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the trans-history connection becomes even clearer.

Nevertheless, why his sons?

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

"We are unclean for the soul of man (nefesh adam)." (Bamidbar 9:7)

This posuk is from an earlier parshah, Parashas BeHa'alosecha. The section is dealing with Pesach Sheni, the day on which those who were spiritually impure on Pesach itself can make amends and

offer their Pesach-Offering. It was a law that came to light because of Mishael and Elzaphan, cousins of Nadav and Avihu who had been charged to deal with their bodies after they had died.

Since Nadav and Avihu had died on the eighth day of Nissan, and it takes seven complete days to become spiritually purified from contact with the dead, Mishael and Elzaphan missed being able to bring their Korban Pesach, which cannot be brought by someone spiritually defiled, even by one day. This was their complaint to Moshe Rabbeinu.

However, on the level of sod, it is not so much a matter of WHAT they said as much as HOW they said it, referring to Nadav and Avihu as 'nefesh adam,' which literally means, the 'soul of Adam,' as in Adam HaRishon. Comments Rav Chaim Vital:

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, since the main Nefesh of Adam was only in Avihu. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 33)

In other words, like father like son. For, just as Aharon HaKohen was supposed to have rectified the sin of Adam HaRishon, so too were Nadav and Avihu also supposed to be rectifying the Nefesh of Adam HaRishon. Therein lies the subtle but crucial connection between Aharon's failure to act properly in the incident of the calf and the deaths of his two sons, Nadav and Avihu. What was lost through the father was gained through the sons, who had their own scores to be settled by Heaven.

In truth, even the Jewish nation had a part in the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, at least in terms of how they died:

Now, had the Jewish people not sinned with the calf, the zuhama (spiritually impurity from the Original Snake) would have been completely removed from them. Had that been the case, 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 adhere once again to the Nefesh of Adam (which was in Nadav and Avihu). 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." This is the reason why Nadav and Avihu were considered "equal" to the entire Jewish people, like Moshe and Aharon, because they had possessed the Nefesh of Adam HaRishon. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 33)

In other words, the world was on the path to rectification once the Jewish people had accepted Torah, even having achieved the status of Adam HaRishon before his sin (Arizal). However, once the golden calf had entered the community, it was downhill once again. Not only did this lead to the burning of Nadav and Avihu, but for all we know, it was what made their sin possible in the first place. It was the golden calf, after all, that made the construction of the Mishkan a necessity.

And, if you think all this cosmic cause and effect stopped way back when, think again. It is what directs the events of everyday life, even today, as the world seeks its inevitable rectification from what went wrong back at the beginning of history.

Melave Malkah:

If you diligently keep My commandments which I command you to do, to love G-d your G-d, go in all of His ways, and cling to Him, then G-d will dispossess all these nations before you, and you will take from nations greater and mightier than your are. (Devarim 11:22-23)

Mitzvah #434 (Positive Mitzvah #184) is: Continuously attach yourself and be in the presence of true Torah scholars, as it says, "cling to Him." The verse, of course, is talking about clinging to G-d, which, being that G-d is non-corporeal, is impossible to do. Therefore, explains the Talmud, it means cling to those who are close to G-d, those people being true Torah scholars.

However, there is a way to take the verse literally, at least to some extent. Some might call it a 'sleeper' of an idea.

According to Torah tradition, sleep is not just to relax and rest the mind and body. It is, in fact, to release the soul, which otherwise remains bound up with the physical body and limited in its ability to rectify itself. Though, this too is part of the rectification process, in fact the main part, there is another aspect of rectification that actually occurs each night when we go to sleep.

"When a person sleeps at night he deposits his Nefesh with G-d, as it is known. Thus, it is possible for the Nefesh to remain above..." (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 3)

Many people ask the question at some point in life, "Why am I here?" The answers to the question may be as varied as there are colors in the rainbow, and then some. However, the REAL answer is, "I'm here to fix up my Nefesh, so I can then work on fixing up my Ruach, after which I can finally complete the process by rectifying my Neshamah." You can't be more accurate than this for an answer to the question of why we are here.

These, of course, are the Hebrew names for the three lower (of five) levels of soul. Through our deeds, words, and thoughts, we affect each level accordingly to how G-d set up the system of rectification. Thus, this is what the mitzvos help us to do, to rectify different parts of the soul, or different aspects of the same level, which is why different mitzvos utilize different parts of the human being.

Sleep also figures in the system of soul rectification:

"All of this is alluded to in the posuk, "(With) my soul (Nafshi) I longed for You at night; even (with) my spirit (Ruchi) within me I beseeched You." (Yeshayahu 26:9) It means: My Nefesh - once it became

purified and until it was able to cling to You, b'sod "and cling to Him" (Devarim 11:22) - desired and yearned to cling to You. The desiring and yearning is specifically at night, at the time when souls are deposited... From the strength of this yearning and purification which makes possible the total adherence, it (the Nefesh) can remain there and not descend. In the morning when it comes time for the Nefesh to descend once again and it does not, then the Ruach can enter him instead." (Ibid.)

Thus, the deeper meaning of the posuk from this week's parshah is a description of the relationship between a person's soul and G-d Himself. As one's soul yearns for perfection and closeness to G-d, and actually achieves it, then it is said to 'cling' to G-d. Nighttime seems to be a particularly good time for doing this, and much can be accomplished to this end while one sleeps. In fact, many Kabbalists have a pre-sleep procedure to try and maximize the sleep experience.

So, when you go to sleep tonight, remember, your body goes to bed, but your soul goes to Heaven.

Have a great Shabbos,
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