

THE "EIGHTH"

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

The sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, each took his censor and put fire in it and put incense on it and offered it before G-d... (Vayikra 10:1)

The story of Nadav and Avihu is both dramatic and quick, at least in the Torah. It is an unmitigated disaster: at the height of human success when the Divine Presence descended to dwell within a man-made creation - the Mishkan - Nadav and Avihu stepped over halachic boundaries and brought upon themselves instantaneous death from Heaven.

Regarding the reason for their sudden and tragic deaths, the Talmud says:

Moshe and Aharon were walking along the way followed by Nadav and Avihu, who were followed by the rest of the Jewish people. Nadav said to Avihu, "When will these two elders die so that you and I can lead the generation." The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to them, "We will see who will bury whom!" (Sanhedrin 52b)

However, as disrespectful as this attitude may have been, especially considering that they were referring to Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon Kohen Gadol, what did they actually do wrong to warrant such strict Divine retribution? The following helps to explain this:

Rebi Elazar said: The sons of Aharon did not die until they taught a law in front of Moshe their teacher. What did they derive? "The sons of Aharon put fire on the altar" (Vayikra 1:7): They said, "Even though fire will come down from Heaven there is a mitzvah to bring normal fire as well." (Eiruvim 63a)

This is referring to the igniting of the altar onto which the sacrifices were to be placed for burning. Originally, fire came down from Heaven and ignited the wood that had been set up for this purpose. However, Nadav and Avihu understood that there was a separate mitzvah to bring ordinary fire as well, which they did without asking Moshe.

This, says the Talmud, is a very serious offence, for:

One who teaches law in the presence of his teacher is punishable by death. (Brochos 31b)

While this sounds somewhat extreme, it is important to recall how much emphasis Judaism places

on the transmission of Torah tradition as the basis of everyday Jewish life and belief. Maintaining the integrity of that tradition means maintaining the integrity of the teacher-student relationship, which by definition cannot be reversed. For, it is the previous generation that is the current generation's link to all the previous generations before it, going all the way back to Moshe Rabbeinu and Mt. Sinai.

If that is so of one's own living rabbi, how much more so is this the case of the rabbis of the Talmudic era, as Rabbi Shlomo Elyashiv writes:

"The main obligation of a Jew is to believe with perfect faith that all that is found within the words of the rabbis, either in halachah, Aggados of Shas (midrashim within the Talmud), and the Midrashim, are "the words of the Living G-d." All they have said is with the Divine Spirit which has spoken through them, as it says, "the Secrets of G-d to those who fear Him" (Sanhedrin 48b)." (Drushei Olam HaTohu, 2:4:19:6)

In other words, there is something special about the rabbis who recorded the Mishnah and the Talmud, and certainly those who preceded them in the Talmudic chain. It wasn't just their sterling character traits or prowess of intellectual ability, but something called "Ruach HaKodesh," which literally means "holy spirit" but which, in this case refers to a kind of supernatural connection to Heaven.

Thus, on the outside they may appear merely like great rabbis, but on the inside there is a supernatural pipeline to Heaven that guides their thinking and provides them with insights the average person cannot know. As a reward for developing their fear of G-d, that is, their belief in the hand of G-d in all that occurs, G-d shares with them Heavenly secrets. Even to this day, G-d shares "secrets" with those who fear Him - acknowledge His Existence and live each day with the reality of It.

Based upon this, Rav Elyashiv has more to add, as we will now discuss, b"H.

Shabbos Day:

...An authorized fire not commanded of them. (Vayikra 10:1)

Continues the Leshem (Rabbi Elyashiv):

"Anyone who tries to use his own wisdom to understand their words in order to contemplate their accuracy puts himself into grave danger, for human intelligence cannot understand them and he is liable to come to heresy, G-d should help us. With respect to this, Koheles said, "Do not be overly righteous and excessively wise. Why be left desolate?" (Koheles 7:16). One who enters himself into this will find it difficult to go against his own perspective and he will always try to balance out both

views."

In other words, when life is a matter of opinion not only is it not dangerous to investigate what others have said, but it is healthy and prudent to do so. However, even if the Talmud seems to be a matter of many opinions, it is really a discussion of G-d-fearing Torah leaders being lead by Heaven in search of halachic solutions, the process of which teaches us a large amount as well as the conclusions reached. This is why the Talmud can say with respect to two apparently divergent opinions that "both are the words of the Living G-d."

If someone approaches the Talmud with the assumption that it is only the product of rabbis from the distant past and that his "modern" opinion may hold more merit than theirs, every time he runs into an intellectual road block he is bound to assume that his opinion is the correct one. Given the choice to abandon his own opinion in the matter or that of the rabbis, like so many before and after him, he will hold fast to his own opinion. Otherwise, he will have to change his way of thinking which may seem less safe (and certainly less convenient) than ignoring rabbis who are not alive today to enforce their viewpoint.

This is the reason for all the "strange fires" that have been offered throughout the ages, fires "not commanded of them." Without the proper respect for the rabbis before them they have gone and changed Judaism to their liking, breaking the link in their family.

"Therefore, they have said with respect to heresy: "All that come to her do not return, and they will not reach the paths of life" (Mishlei 2:19; Avodah Zarah 17a). However, the "righteous person lives through his faith" (Chavakuk 2:4), because it is the foundation of the entire Torah."

For those who have grown up secular without the proper exposure to Torah and its history, there is almost no choice in the matter. How can they be expected to respect the rabbis of the Talmud if they don't know what it is or who they were?

However, many others have or will be exposed to enough of the Talmud, and/or the rabbis of that period of history to be confronted with a decision: do I accept my understanding over theirs and reject it, or do I assume that they may have known something we don't, even today after all we have gone through since their time? Do I simply have faith in Torah and their explanation of it?

Says the Leshem, the latter is the foundation of Torah and the survival of Torah Judaism. Not only that, but it is also the rectification for an even greater sin in the history of mankind: the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil:

"This sin was also included in the sin of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, as it says, 'the tree was desirable for understanding'."

After all, this was the first time a student (Chava) assumed that her understanding and appreciation of the moment was greater than her own teacher's (Adam). Furthermore, to succeed at carrying through with this tremendous transgression, she had to somehow exclude G-d from the picture,

which she apparently did.

It was the first time, and it certainly wasn't the last time, as this week's parshah shows. Worse yet, as Jewish history continues to reveal, as it becomes increasingly harder to find Jews loyal to the tradition of Talmud, going all the way back to its origins.

SEUDAH SHLISHIS:

Moshe said to Aharon: This is what G-d said to me, saying, "Through My close ones I will be sanctified..."
(Vayikra 10:3)

There is the other side to the story which transforms Nadav and Avihu from being bad guys into good guys. One might assume that Moshe was only trying to comfort his mournful brother. However, "Toras Moshe" is "Toras Emes" - one-hundred percent truth - and therefore Moshe's statement must be one of fact, not to mention prophecy. This is certainly the approach that all of the commentators take when scrambling to prove how it is true.

However, none of the classical commentators touch on that which is found in Sha'ar HaGilgulim regarding the two sons of Aharon, something that expands the quick and tragic account of the death of Nadav and Avihu into something far more global and rectifying. However, this will take some explaining:

"When Kayin and Hevel, Adam's sons were born, they received the level of Nefesh, Ruach, and Neshamah from Asiyah, Yetzirah, and Beriyah, as well as the level of Nefesh of Atzilus which previously had been their father's. As is well known, every soul has levels called 'Ohr Makif' and 'Ohr Penimi'."

Every soul has five levels to it - from the bottom up: Nefesh, Ruach, Neshamah, Chayah, and Yechidah - that help to filter G-d's light so that our bodies can physically exist while interacting with the spiritual. The three lowest levels are considered to be less spiritual compared to the two uppermost levels, which are too spiritual to be contained by any kind of vessel, let alone a body. Therefore, they are said to be encompassing levels (makifim) as opposed to those on the "inside" (penimim).

In the beginning, Adam HaRishon contained the souls of all of humanity. However, because of the sin of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, only the part of soul necessary for his own personal life remained with him, the rest being divided up amongst the rest of mankind throughout history, all of which were subject to reincarnation.

This was especially so when it came to his own sons, Kayin and Hevel. Thus, they received their own particular souls, and in addition, they received a level of soul that Adam had lost because of the sin, called here the "Nefesh of Atzilus." (I could explain what this means, but it is not central to this

discussion.)

The Arizal continues:

"When Yisro, the father-in-law of Moshe converted, he merited the Nefesh of Atzilus that had been given to Kayin, but just on the level of Ohr Penimi, of which it writes, "Chever the Kenite separated from Kenites" (Shoftim 4:11). We will explain this in its proper place. Nadav and Avihu took the Ohr Makif of the Nefesh of Atzilus of Adam, which had been given to his son Kayin."

In other words, Chever was in fact Yisro, and the reference to "Kenite" is an allusion to Kayin, from whom he received the three levels mentioned above within the level called "Nefesh of Atzilus" - a subset of the fourth level of soul called "Chayah."

At this point, Sha'ar HaGilgulim shows how Pinchas, the grandson of Aharon HaKohen was a combination from Yosef HaTzaddik and Yisro, after which it says:

"Thus we find that Pinchas took a Soul-Spark from Yisro, which was the level of Ohr Penimi of the Nefesh of Adam HaRishon from Atzilus. After that, because Nadav and Avihu had died when they brought the unauthorized Incense-Offering (Vayikra 10:1), when Pinchas killed Zimri he merited the souls of Nadav and Avihu, which were the Ohr Makif of Adam of Atzilus. This was possible because he already possessed a spark from the root of Yisro, and it completed the Nefesh of Atzilus within him, since he now possessed both the Ohr Penimi and the Ohr Makif. However, the Ohr Penimi entered him as an actual gilgul when he was born, while the Ohr Makif came to him b'sod ibur, after he was born and had grown up."

In other words, the part of the soul called "Penimi" was the actual soul that Pinchas had been born with, and which could not separate from his body except through death. However, the part of the soul called the "Makif" which came to him from Nadav and Avihu, entered him while he was a full-grown adult while he was already alive as an "additional soul," like a fetus within its mother. Therefore, it could come and go without killing Pinchas in the process.

This transformation, explains the Arizal, not only made Pinchas spiritually greater, but it triggered a process of which we will be the beneficiaries of at the End-of-Days, as we will show, b"H, perhaps even as early as this Shavuot!

MELAVE MALKAH:

Behold, I will send you Eliyahu the Prophet before the great and awesome day of G-d. (Malachi 3:23)

"Thus, we find that four levels were in Pinchas. The first was that of the Nefesh of Pinchas himself from birth, a single soul even though it was the combination of two drops, one from Yosef and one from Yisro. The second level was that of the Nefesh of Nadav and Avihu, which came b'sod ibur and

was also called "one soul," as is known from the Zohar: Nadav and Avihu were two limbs of one body (Acharei Mos 57b). The third was the Nefesh called "Eliyahu HaTishbi" from the root of Gad, and the fourth level was "Eliyahu" from the root of Binyomin."

Thus, because Nadav and Avihu died through the incident in this week's parshah, their souls from Kayin were available for reincarnation and rectification. Thus, when Pinchas killed Zimri in his act of zealousness on behalf of G-d, he drew those souls towards himself and initiated a process that brought other souls towards him that literally transformed him into Eliyahu the Prophet!

However, the story does not end there. Unfortunately, Pinchas was later involved in a particular sin that caused him to lose the souls of Nadav and Avihu. Therefore:

"After that, his (Pinchas') name changed to "Eliyahu HaTishbi." Nadav and Avihu had not been rectified through him, and Pinchas himself from the side of Yisro had been involved in the sin with the daughter of Yiftach. Eliyahu, from the tribe of Binyomin, had only been in him b'ibur to join together the other souls. What remained as the main part was Eliyahu from the root of Gad, and therefore he could no longer be called "Pinchas," but rather "Eliyahu HaTishbi," alluding that his soul was from the tribe of Gad."

However, this transformation into Eliyahu worked in his favor creating the opportunity for rectification at a later date in time, a famous later date in time:

"Thus, when prophecy returned to him it was after he was called "Eliyahu HaTishbi." This was after Shmuel had died . . ."

Shmuel HaNavi, that is, whose prophecy came to him because he had inherited the souls of Nadav and Avihu in the meantime. Once Shmuel died, their souls once again were free to reincarnate, which they did:

"... And thus, Nadav and Avihu were able to return to him b'ibur during the incident of Mt. Carmel, when the people fell upon their faces and said, 'Hashem is Elokim' (I Melachim 18:20-29). At that time, they (Nadav and Avihu) were forgiven for their sin of "cutting off their plantings" by blemishing the Divine Presence, when they (the nation) said, "Hashem is Elokim." Understand this. For, because they (Nadav and Avihu) had sinned in the beginning when they glanced at the Shechinah at Mt. Sinai, as it says, "They saw the G-d of Israel" (Shemos 24:10), they underwent rectification when they (the nation) fell on their faces in order to avoid seeing the fire that descended from Heaven."

Voila! It took a few centuries and quite a bit of spiritual wandering, but finally at the dramatic and famous incident with Eliyahu at Mt. Carmel, the souls of Nadav and Avihu achieved rectification, which meant that Kayin also did. Thus, they were free to return to Heaven for good, and Eliyahu remains in waiting to herald the end of history and the arrival of Moshiach.

May it occur in our time, and if this is really the eighth year of the Sh'mittah Cycle that we are in, you can't begin to imagine how great the potential is for this period between Pesach and Shavuot to be

that time. Depending upon where we are holding in history, it is a potential that could be actualized whether we're ready or not.

Have a great Shabbos,
Pinchas Winston

This week's parshah sheet is in the merit and loving memory of Chaim ben Yitzchak, z"l, by his son and family, whose many acts of chesed and support of Torah causes will surely bring great honor to their father's soul and elevation after elevation.