

SOUL LONG, NADAV & AVIHU

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

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

THE NATION WAS stunned, horrified. "What just happened?" people asked themselves, and one another, in a state of total disbelief. They had gone from the HIGHEST of heights to the LOWEST of lows faster than the speed of gravity. It would take time for the magnitude of the event to settle in, and even longer to recover from it.

For seven days Moshe Rabbeinu had officiated in the initiation of the Mishkan, while Aharon and his sons only looked on. They only watched and learned for the day they would take over the responsibility, on the eighth day. On the same day Nadav and Avihu assumed their roles as kohanim, they died because of it as well.

Nadav and Avihu were Aharon HaKohen's eldest sons, the one's destined to eventually replace their father at the head of the nation as Kohen Gadol. Now they were only destined to be buried before their father even had a chance to retire from his holy position. Their opportunity to shine had come and gone in the blink of an eye.

Later there would be a debate as to the cause of their deaths. Rabbi Eliezer would later argue, "Aharon's sons died only because they decided halachah in the presence of Moshe, their teacher," when they brought their unauthorized fire. Consequently, the same flame that had miraculously descended from Heaven to consume the korbanos offered consumed Nadav and Avihu as well.

Rabbi Yishmael would say: "[They died because] they had entered the sanctuary after having drunk wine. The proof is that after their death, [Torah] admonished the survivors that they may not enter the sanctuary after having drunk wine...Thus [it said], 'A fire went out from before God and burned them up, and they died before God.' We would not know why they died, except for His commanding Aharon, 'Do not drink wine that will lead to intoxication.' We know from this that they died precisely on account of the wine."

Then there was their father's own sin. Back at Har Sinai, while Moshe Rabbeinu was still up on the mountain receiving Torah, the Erev Rav pressed Aharon HaKohen to build them a golden calf. THEY had intended to make it a replacement for Moshe Rabbeinu, whom they had thought died on the mountain. Aharon however had intended it as a stall tactic, to put the people off until Moshe

Rabbeinu returned to the camp to restore order.

Even though Aharon had the best of intentions, it was still considered to be a grievous sin, as the Torah later tells us: "God was very furious with Aharon, to destroy him, so I prayed also for Aharon at that time." Rashi explains: "'God was very furious with Aharon'...because he listened to you...'to destroy him'...this refers to the destruction of [his] children'...so I prayed also for Aharon'...And my prayer succeeded to atone for half, and thus two [of his sons] died, and two remained [alive]."

Whatever the reason for the death, they were gone, and in the most dramatic of ways. And, seemingly forever, just like that.

Physically perhaps, but not spiritually. Their physical journeys may have been short, but their spiritual ones outlasted the people they left behind who lived full lives.

"Nadav and Avihu made a drastic mistake that cost them their lives," the aging Mekubel said with a twinkle in his eye. "But that only meant that they had to complete their tikunim through the lives of other great people."

The four of them sat inside of a cave in the hills of Tzfas, the rebi and his three students. They met there three times a week, always at the same time. There was no electricity, and they did not even use flashlights. The melted wax all over the stones of the area revealed that candles had always been their source of light.

They learned there because it cut them off from the world around them. They could have been on the moon, for all they knew, barely hearing even the chirping of the birds just outside the cave entrance. Other than the odd snake or scorpion, they remained free of all distraction, enabling them to focus completely on the material.

They learned slowly and thoroughly, discussing every point in detail. Currently they were in the middle of Sha'ar HaGilgulim, the Arizal's teachings about the rules of reincarnation and personal growth. The topic of that time was the deaths of the Nadav and Avihu, and the reincarnation of their souls.

"As we have discussed," the Mekubel began to explain, "there are basically two types of reincarnation. There is the soul that you are born with, without which you cannot live. When it leaves, so does life."

They listened intently, even though they had gone over this information before.

"Then there is an ibur. An ibur is a soul, or souls, that can come to a person who had already been alive for years, and when it leaves, the person continues to live. An example of an ibur is the Nefesh of Nadav and Avihu that came to Pinchas, after he killed Zimri when he sinned with the Midianite princess, Cozbi."

"Was this part of Pinchas's reward?" one of the students asked.

"Yes, because of what it triggered. Since a person is not born with an ibur soul, it does not naturally join with the host's original soul. For that, an additional ibur is required, and in the case of Pinchas, that new soul was called, 'Eliyahu HaTishbi.' It came in order to connect and join together the Nefesh of Nadav and Avihu with the Nefesh of Pinchas himself."

"So," another asked, "Eliyahu was not born like other people, but just started his life inside Pinchas?"

"Right," their teacher answered, and then continued. "However, Pinchas further required another new soul as well in order to connect and join the new soul called 'Eliyahu HaTishbi' with the rest of the old souls, the Nefesh of Pinchas and Nadav and Avihu. Therefore, it was necessary for an additional new soul to come into Pinchas which was also called 'Eliyahu,' except that it came from the root of Binyomin."

"So Pinchas had five souls in him," the student recounted, "the Nefesh of Pinchas himself with which he was born, the Nefesh of Nadav and Avihu, the Nefesh called 'Eliyahu HaTishbi' from the root of Gad, and the Nefesh called 'Eliyahu' from the root of Binyomin?"

"Actually," the Mekubel corrected, "only FOUR. Nadav and Avihu are considered as two halves of a single soul, as the Zohar says."

"Did the souls of Nadav and Avihu stay with Pinchas all of his life, until he went up to Heaven as Eliyahu HaNavi?"

"No," he answered. "For a while the souls of Nadav and Avihu went elsewhere. When the incident of the daughter of Yiftach HaGiladi occurred, Pinchas was punished. Our rabbis, z"l, say that Yiftach was a judge and did not want to go to the house of Eliyahu to annul his vow, and Eliyahu did not want to go to him because he said, 'Someone who feels the pain goes to the doctor.' Between the two of them, the daughter of Yiftach remained a victim of her father's vow, and therefore both of them were punished. Everywhere Yiftach went limbs fell off. Eliyahu was punished by the removal of the Divine Presence from him, because the ibur of Nadav and Avihu, was removed from him. This is the sod of what our rabbis, z"l, say that the Vav of 'My covenant of peace' is severed."

All of them sat quietly for a while, thinking over what had been said. Their teacher felt it would be worthwhile to summarize the entire matter.

"Let's go over it from start to finish. In the incident with Zimri, Pinchas merited the ibur of Nadav and Avihu. After he killed Zimri and Cozbi, the rest of the Jewish nation wanted to kill HIM, since Zimri had been a prince. When he saw them coming for him, it shocked him to the point that his soul flew away. That's when the ibur of Nadav and Avihu entered him. When he lost the ibur from the sin—which is what causes an ibur to leave—regarding the daughter of Yiftach, then the Vav of his name was cut, when the Divine Presence and the ibur of Nadav and Avihu were removed from him. After that, nothing remained with Pinchas except his own soul, other than the spark of the drop from the root of Yosef alone, because the ibur of Nadav and Avihu went to Shmuel as mentioned. Also,

the spark of the drop of Yisro was removed from him."

"Where did Nadav and Avihu go after that?" one of them asked.

"To Shmuel HaNavi. The addition of Nadav and Avihu turns a person into a prophet, because of where their souls come from. As long as Shmuel had their souls in him, which he did until he died, he remained a prophet. As long as Pinchas was without them, he could NOT be a prophet."

"But we see that Pinchas became Eliyahu again, and dies a prophet?"

"That's right," the Mekubel agreed. "That's because after Shmuel HaNavi died, Nadav and Avihu later returned to Pinchas for the rest of his life, which is why his name was changed from 'Pinchas' to 'Eliyahu HaTishbi'."

"At that time," the Mekubel continued, "once prophecy returned to Pinchas, Nadav and Avihu returned to him as an ibur. They became complete in their own rectification during the matter of Har Carmel, when the people fell on their faces and said, 'Hashem is Elokim.' Then their sin of the unauthorized incense offering was forgiven."

"Furthermore," he continued to explain, "though in the beginning they sinned by looking at the Divine Presence at Mt. Sinai, as it says, 'They saw the God of Israel, etc.' they became rectified at that time when they, inside Eliyahu at Har Carmel, fell on their faces and did not look at the fire that came down from Heaven."

The students absorbed every word. They said nothing. They didn't have to. Their faces clearly indicated that they were amazed by what they heard. But then again, why should that day be different from anything other...

"Is there more?" one finally asked.

"There always is," the Mekubel said, smiling. "There was Elisha HaNavi as well. He too was blessed with an ibur of Nadav and Avihu, which greatly enhanced his prophecy. There is a lot more to this as well, but perhaps another day. It is already late, and we should return."

The students looked at one another, the face of each showing disappointment that their session was already over. But they had learned a tremendous amount, even in the short time, and windows previously closed had been opened for them.

"It is too bad," one said as they rose to leave, "that so few people know anything about what happened to Nadav and Avihu after they died. From the Torah, it looks as if they lived briefly without contributing too much to history, except in a negative way."

"Yes," said another student, "and when Moshe Rabbeinu told Aharon that the deaths of Nadav and Avihu showed how they were greater than the two of them, it sounds only like consolation. From Sod, it is clear that they WERE great people!"

The Mekubel just smiled, pleased to have such students, and the opportunity to teach them. Then he too got up, and gathering his belongings, led the small group back to a world that barely had an inkling of the deep truths they had discussed.