

ACCEPTING TIME

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Moshe comforted Aharon with the knowledge that Nadav and Avihu were "taken" because they were the "greatest." Rav Moshe Zt'l in Darash Moshe explained that there is a concept of G-d "needing" certain nishamos (souls) in heaven. As the Talmud says regarding the death of Rebbi (Judah the Prince), "The lower beings desired him and the higher ones wanted him." In some unfathomable equation of circumstance and consequence G-d recalls select nishamos; however, He only does so if they are the greatest of the great.

The Talmud relates that Moshe knew that "one of them" would die, and had thought that it would be either himself or Aharon. With the deaths of Nadav and Avihu at the seminal moment of the Mizbeach's (alter's) inauguration, Moshe knew that it was them and not himself or Aharon whom G-d had intended to "take."

Chazal (the Rabbis) tell us that Nadav and Avihu would openly say, "When will these two old men (Moshe and Aharon) die so that we can ascend to the leadership of the Jewish nation?" Furthermore, Chazal attributed cause to the consequences of their deaths. (a) "They performed the service having drunk wine." (b) "They ruled a Halacha (Jewish law) in the presence of their teachers." (c) "They offered an offering that was not commanded and in a manner that was a desecration." Who were Nadav and Avihu, and what was their rationale for doing what they did?"

"G-d created me with a pure heart and He innovated within me a proper spirit." This verse in Tehilim (Psalms) applies to each of us as well as the entire universe. Like the pristine white of an unmarred blanket of fresh snow all things are created new and pure. Gan Eden (Garden of Eden) was pure until Adam and Chava sinned. The nation was pure until they sinned with the Golden Calf; and following the first Yom Kippur the nation was again pure until Nadav and Avihu offered their "strange offering".

Rav Dessler explains that every pure moment has its challenge. If the challenge is met successfully redemption is immediate; if not, that moment's potential greatness is lost forever. There will be other moments and other challenges, but they will be different and the actuality or degree of redemption will be different.

The first moment of challenge was Gan Eden. All Adam had to do was not give into the Nachash (serpent) and the era of Tikun Olam (the perfected world) would have begun. The Tree of Knowledge would have been granted to them rather than their taking it amidst rebellion and selfishness. (This is according to the opinion that the "Forbidden Tree" was the vineyard and that G-d

would have granted them its secrets on the first Shabbos - if only they had waited.) What they desired was good. How they went about getting it was bad. History as we know it would have been completely different. Instead, humankind entered a phase where the Shechina (G-d's presence) retreated behind the facade of nature making it humanities responsibility to discover and reveal G-d's presence and intent.

At the foot of Mt. Sinai the nation was "as one being with one heart." The pure heart was returned to us and the whole of the Jewish people became as Adam before he had sinned. Had we waited patiently for Moshe to return with the newly configured "Eitz Hadas - Tree of Knowledge - the Torah," we could have ushered in the era of Tikun Olam. All of us would have been a nation of Kohanim (priests) with the singular purpose, focus, and ordained sanctity to teach the greatness of G-d to the rest of the world. Instead, we sinned with the Golden Calf and G-d's presence departed from within each of us. We had returned to rebellion and selfishness and the Shechina retreated beyond the desert camp. No longer would we all be Kohanim. No longer could the world be a holy of holies and all of time be the holiest of times.

Chosen to serve and chosen to teach, Aharon and his sons took center stage. As Kohain Gadol (High Priest) and as Kohanim, they reflected the norm that should have been for all of us and the distance we now would have to travel. Preeminent within the Kohanim was Aharon and all the Kohanim Gedolim who would one day fill his place. They were the ones who would be what Nadav and Avihu most desired. That is why the details of the Yom Kippur service, this week's first Parsha (section of the Torah), begins with the reference to the "aftermath of the death of the sons of Aharon."

In the end the issue is always time; the timeless eternity of G-d vs. the time bound mortality of creation. We must accept that limitation and the patience life and history demand of us. Had Adam and Chava only waited a few short moments redemption would have already been. Had Nadav and Avihu been patient for their turn to at leadership, who knows what they would have accomplished? We too must be patient; we too must learn how to use time; we too must learn to trust G-d's goodness and know that He who controls time truly controls the universe.

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