

HIGH STANDARDS

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The Torah itself records the reaction of Moshe to the tragic deaths of the sons of Aharon. Moshe tells his grieving brother that the Lord had informed him, "that I will sanctify My name through those who are nearest to Me." Therefore even though the harsh judgment against Aharon - the dramatic and unexpected deaths of his two elder sons, Nadav and Avihu - dominates the mood of the moment, there is a subtle message of consolation and explanation that Moshe offers to his brother.

And that perhaps is one of the reasons that Aharon remained silent in acceptance of the fate that befell him and his family. Aharon apparently realized that there was a higher purpose also involved in these events - the sanctification of God's name and a warning against tampering with the ritual services of the Tabernacle/Temple/Mishkan - and this realization motivated his silence.

It is very difficult for us ordinary mortals to appreciate the nature of this means of sanctification. We tremble at having to think of God's sanctification and the ennobling of God's name in the world when we are forced always to think of death and human tragedy. We much prefer to think of God's greatness in terms of charity, compassion, comfort and consolation.

Yet, as mortals who possess an eternal soul, we all realize that death and tragedy are all part of life - unavoidable parts of life that we all experience and must deal with. Thus Moshe's words to his brother regarding death and tragedy are really addressed to all of us as well. That is the reason they appear in the Torah, whose words are directed to all humans for all time.

Those who are closest to God in their physical lifetime are treated specially and uniquely by Heaven for good or for better. This is a partial insight into the overall pattern of challenge and difficulty that is the leitmotif of Jewish history. The Jewish people are special and being special carries with it great burdens and responsibilities. Even small errors of judgment or weakness and deviation of behavior can carry with it grave and lasting consequences.

As such, all Jews should feel that every action and pattern of behavior that becomes part of their lives is scrutinized, judged and brings forth reaction from God and humans. Nothing that happens in God's world is ignored or even forgotten. We are held to high standards. We are tight-rope walkers and there is no real safety net stretched out beneath us.

We all realize that a hurt inflicted upon us by a family member or close friend pains us much more deeply than from a similar hurt suffered by us from a stranger or even an enemy. Those who are closest to us are the ones that can hurt us the most. And that also is part of the message that Moshe

told his brother. Since we are so close to God, Heaven is more pained, so to speak, by our shortcomings, insults and deviations from His path of instruction for us.

So our relationship to God is one of particular favor but also one of great challenge and responsibility. Simply by realizing this do we enhance our own holiness and help sanctify God's name.

Shabat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com