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“Do Not Play With Fire!”

In this week's Parsha, we come across the tragic episode in which two sons of Aharon Hakohen bring forbidden fire before Hashem. At the climax of the inauguration of the Kohanim, after Aharon had performed his various sacrifices, Nadav and Avihu brought incense, an alien fire. The outcome of their passionate offering, however, was that fire descended from Hashem and consumed them.

At first glance, we must be confounded by Aharon's silence and Moshe's comment to his bereaved brother, namely, that Hashem had spoken of this matter earlier. For God had previously told Moshe (Shemot 29:43): “There [in the Ohel Moed] I will meet with Bnei Yisrael; and it shall be sanctified by My glory” (*Venikdash Bichevodi*) (cf. Vayikra 10: 1-3).

Based on the discussion in the Gemara (Zevachim 115b), Rashi understands that the Hebrew term *Bichevodi* can be read alternately as *Bichvodai* – “[by] those close to me.” That is to say that Hashem hinted to Moshe that at the time of the inauguration of the Mishkan, some event involving holy people would be involved

in the process of sanctifying God's name in the eyes of the people.

Citing *Vayikra Rabba*, Rashi adds that Moshe had no idea whom the persona involved would be. He tells Aharon that he assumed that the individuals close to Hashem would be either Aharon or himself. Now it turns out, in Moshe's words, that Nadav and Avihu were “greater than they.” As Aharon internalizes that message, he remains silent.

Rabbi Pinchas Langer pertinently reminds us that Nadav and Avihu acted out of free choice: Their actions were *not* premeditated by Hashem. With all the two sons' best intentions and in the aftermath of their demise, a lesson for the people was nevertheless generated.

In retrospect, the Kli Yakar explains the phrase, “and it shall be sanctified by My glory.” He indicates that Bnei Yisrael would now understand that if such holy persons as Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu, failed to grasp that with all their zeal to serve Hashem, one cannot transgress the word of God, how much more should (we), the rank and file, be awed, thus to be careful to serve Hashem within the boundaries He set for us. ■

Shabbat Shalom!

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