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In the Merit of the People

Our Parsha begins by recording that after the death of Aharon's two sons, Hashem tells Moshe to caution his brother not to enter the Holy Sanctuary (*Kodesh Kodoshim*) at any time but Yom Kippur when he will atone for the people's sins.

The reference to Nadav and Avihu's demise implies that Aharon should not repeat the same mistake as his sons, not just by acting in error but also by refraining from behaving inappropriately. For although the reason given here for the son's loss of life is that they "approached before Hashem," several traditional Torah commentators added that they died, *inter alia*, on account of not honoring Moshe and abstaining from having children (cf. Netivot Shalom, *Acharei*).

What is the connection between these observations, the Yom Kippur service, and the sons' downfall? During the Yom Kippur service, the Kohen Gadol would tremulously enter the *Kodesh Kodoshim* to ask for the people's penitence. Notably, during that fearful time, the Kohanim and the people gathered outside in the Temple court, *the Azara*. They were participating in

Aharon's mission, as it were, by prostrating themselves and praying. The term *Azara* hints that they were there to help, to assist Aharon in his fateful quest.

The people, then, are an integral part of the forgiving process, for Aharon was indeed appointed "*from among the people*" (Shemot 28:1). The Netivot Shalom indicates that only in their merit and with their support could Aharon successfully complete the Avodah service on Yom Kippur. It was as if Aharon and the people were as one during that auspicious day.

However, Nadav and Avihu were far removed from the people, even from Moshe, their teacher. In today's terminology, we would say they were on a different planet. They were indeed very holy, but their abstinence and disdain for Moshe demonstrated their distance from Klal Yisrael. Their fire was foreign (cf. Shemot 10:1) not only because it was not requested but also because it was totally removed from the interests of the people as a whole. ■

Shabbat Shalom! *Menachem Persoff*

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