

ACHAREI MOS

LOVE WITHOUT FEAR

A

Mysterious Death

The *parsha* describes the service of the *kohen gadol* on Yom Kippur. Specifically, Moshe tells Aharon the proper protocol for entering the *kodesh hakodashim*. The *parsha* begins, though, with an unusual introduction: “Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of the two sons of Aharon when they came improperly before Hashem (into the *kodesh hakodashim*) and died” (Vayikra 16:1). Why did the Torah mention the death of Aharon’s sons in this context?

Simply speaking, the reason is that Aharon’s sons died because they entered the Mishkan inappropriately. Thus, Hashem is telling Aharon to be careful when he goes into the inner sanctum on Yom Kippur. Chassidus, though, always likes to take a deeper approach. The Shem Mishmuel addresses the core problem of the entry of Aharon’s sons. What is the message to Aharon and the other *kohanim gedolim* who follow him regarding entering the *kodesh hakodashim* on Yom Kippur?

Chassidus takes a positive view of Nadav and Avihu, the two sons of Aharon who entered the inner sanctum of the Mishkan and were consumed by a heavenly fire. Chassidus does not consider them wicked people; after all, Moshe himself informed Aharon Hakohen of their death in a positive way. Hashem had told Moshe

previously, “*Bikrovai ekadeish*. I will be sanctified with those close to Me” (Vayikra 10:3). Moshe told Aharon that his two dead sons had been holy people. They were very close to Hashem. Rashi there amplifies this, writing that Moshe said that Nadav and Avihu were even greater than himself and Aharon. “I had a prophetic awareness that there would be a sanctification of God’s name at the dedication ceremony, that someone would give his life in a sacrificial way. I thought it would be either me or you, but now I see it was your sons. They must have been greater than we are.”

We must therefore understand the nature of their error in a deeper way. It can’t be a simple sin. But our Sages do mention various sins, and the Torah itself mentions an *eish zara*, a strange fire. Let us understand the story of Nadav and Avihu in a deeper, more exalted way.

B

The Epicenter of God’s Love

The Shem Mishmuel explains that Nadav and Avihu entered the *kodesh hakodashim* on the day of the inauguration of the Mishkan. This is the same place that Aharon entered on Yom Kippur at the climax of that day’s *avoda*. As we have discussed before, every place in the world represents a certain spiritual energy.

One of the most important spiritual energies is the energy of love, *ahava*. God’s love for the world, and especially for His children the Jewish People, is the root energy of creation. According to the Arizal, God created the world as an act of love; *olam chesed yibaneh* (Tehillim 89:3). Someone who feels love wants to bestow goodness on his beloved. Since Hashem loves people, and especially His Jewish People, He gives support and sustenance to them. To the Jewish People He gave the additional gift of Torah. At the core, everything that exists stems from God’s love.

This fundamental *midda* also finds its expression in a physical

place. There are places in the world where God's love is more concentrated than in other places. All of the energies God created have concentrations in three areas: place, time, and people. These energies sometime conflict with each other. For example, the energy of love conflicts with the energy of fear and constriction. In various places, each energy has a stronger presence. The love of Hashem for people has a place where it is expressed more strongly than in any other place. In this place, we find the epicenter of Hashem's love for the Jewish People.

The *pasuk* states, "The palace of the King Shlomo, is made of wood...silver...gold...and beautiful curtains. Inside, it is full of love for the daughters of Jerusalem" (Shir Hashirim 3:9-10). Rashi explains that this "inside" refers to the *kodesh hakodashim*. Love is expressed in the form of the *aron*, *keruvim*, and *luchos*. The inner sanctum, the *kodesh hakodashim*, is the place where Hashem's love for Israel is most strongly expressed and felt.

In the whole world, we find a combination of God's love and God's justice. We live with this back-and-forth dialectic all the time. There are positive and negative *mitzvos*, which bid us to act or, alternatively, to refrain from action. The Ramban explains that when we do positive *mitzvos*, like shaking a *lulav* and putting on *tefillin*, we show our love for Hashem. When we refrain from doing the actions prohibited by *mitzvos lo sa'asei*, we express fear and respect. We live with *ahava* and *yira* all the time.

In the Beis Hamikdash, there are many restrictions. The *kohanim* and *levi'im* have to be careful to avoid any *tuma*, and there are many other regulations concerning the Temple service. However, once the *kohen gadol* enters the *kodesh hakodashim*, he is engulfed by the pure love of God. This is the meaning of the *pasuk* that the "inside" is full of love.

The Love of Reb Levi Yitzchak

The Shem Mishmuel quotes an intriguing statement from his grandfather, the Kotzker Rebbe. Someone asked him: Why did the first generation of Chassidic masters seem to be completely engulfed with love, the *midda* of *ahava*? They were loyal to their teacher, the Ba'al Shem Tov. These students felt a tremendous love among themselves, and they all got along well. Yet just two generations later, the Chassidic movement experienced many schismatic arguments and disputes between Rebbes and between their Chassidim. What changed?

The Kotzker repeated and strengthened the question. The Ba'al Shem Tov's soul was pure love. He loved Hashem with all his might, and he loved Jews passionately, too. What changed in just two generations that the Chassidim fell back into the old patterns of fighting? What happened to the love that the Ba'al Shem Tov wanted his followers to have for each other? Even today, we still have this troublesome problem. Could we say that the Ba'al Shem Tov was a failure, that he did not succeed in vanquishing the forces of strife?

The Kotzker gave an intriguing answer. One follower of the Ba'al Shem Tov was the famous Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev. He loved Hashem with all of his might and passion, and he loved Jews with the same level of passion. He displayed boundless love for every Jew in the world. On Yom Kippur night, he would crawl under the benches from one end of the *shul* to the other. Nobody knew what he was doing. He looked like he was searching for *chametz*. After crawling through the entire synagogue, he would walk up to the *bima* and proclaim, "Hashem, I am looking for the drunkards. The *goyim* celebrate their new year with drinking. And here we are celebrating with *teshuva* and prayer! There are no drunkards here. See how holy are Your people!"

The Kotzker said, "Because Reb Levi Yitzchak displayed so

much love and forgiveness, he opened up the heavenly gates of the room of love, *sha'ar ha'ahava*. This may be the highest level from which God started the act of creation. Since Reb Levi Yitzchak had such an uncompromising love for Israel, he was able to get the keys and open up that treasure of Hashem's love for Israel."

Chassidus teaches a special principle. Energies come into the world from heaven to the Jewish People for the betterment of the world. If the Jewish People at the time of the Ba'al Shem Tov would have accessed the torrent of love, sweetness, and goodness with Torah and channeled it into the rest of the world, we would have a world without war. We would feel peace, tranquility, and love for our fellow human beings every moment of our lives.

The Kotzker explained further. There was indeed a small group of Jews like Reb Levi Yitzchak, but many other Jews did not get this message. They were busy arguing about who was better and engaging in *sinas chinam*, unjustified fights. Reb Levi Yitzchak had his followers, but most Jews did not agree with him. With the power of his love and devotion, Reb Levi Yitzchak opened up the gates of love in heaven, but the rest of the Jewish People did not take that energy and use it.

Since those energies were not used for good by Jews applying them through Torah, the energies were diverted. This flow then went to the other nations. The other nations don't have the special and sweet nature of the Jews. So when this flow went to the other nations, it produced a bad form of love. This was the beginning of the Romantic era. It was a time during which all the previous taboos about the values of modesty, love, and intimacy, which Christianity had brought to the world from Judaism, disintegrated. For many centuries, intimacy was a topic not to be discussed openly in public. This taboo fell apart in poems and plays. It began to permeate the whole culture. Today, we see a world awash in immorality. We see the degenerate media and literature. It is so much worse today than ever before, and we struggle with that.

All of this is a distortion of the pristine and exalted concept of

love. The relationship between man and woman should be holy, a God-like relationship. Had the Jewish People accepted the vision and mission that Reb Levi Yitzchak wanted for them, the world would have been different. But, unfortunately, most Jews didn't follow his ways of channeling Hashem's love for Israel to the rest of the world. Instead of this power going towards holiness, it went into *tuma*, defilement. If the Godly energy doesn't find its place in some good place, it bounces off and finds its place among evil, because spiritual energy is never wasted. If it is not used properly, it does not simply dissipate—it goes towards evil.

When the other *tzaddikim* saw that this was going on, they decided to close the gates of love. They chose to stop following this path of Reb Levi Yitzchak and the Ba'al Shem Tov, which was to feel and express unbridled and unlimited love. They chose rather to return to the old-time parochialism. They hoped to thereby reduce the power that was being delivered to the side of evil.

This is an important idea. Unbridled love has tremendous power. It is the power that serves as the foundation of creation. But the source of creation can, unfortunately, be used in the wrong way as well.

D

Love Needs Boundaries

Nadav and Avihu were tremendous *tzaddikim*. Love of Hashem was their consuming passion. They thought and felt that they could enter the *kodesh hakodashim*, since Hashem had ordained that they build the Mishkan as the place to ensconce the love of Hashem for His people. Moshe Rabbeinu, the greatest Jew ever, lived among them. This was the time for love without limits. They felt that their generation was ready for unbridled love. They would use the love of the *kodesh hakodashim* only for good. They felt no evil could come from this, so they walked into the *kodesh*

hakodashim full of love and desire to be with God. They were not afraid of death. Death, if it would come, would just be another way of getting closer to Hashem. This is just what happened, though it wasn't intentional. They were blinded by their incredible love for Hashem. They went into the place that they thought was pure love with no punishment. They thought God would destroy the evil of the world and just open up the gates of love.

However, they made a mistake. Neither they nor their generation was ready for that. The Jewish People and the world needed fear of Hashem in order to function. It was not yet time for unbridled, passionate, all-consuming love without the fear of Hashem, without the fear of overstepping bounds.

This was their flaw, and it was a positive one. They loved Hashem so much that they forgot that the people of their generation, themselves included, were not yet ready. They shouldn't have thrown away all restrictions in order to engage in a passionate encounter and embrace with the Almighty.

God uses many different *middos* to relate to the world. Love is foremost among them, but He also utilizes fear and terror. Nadav and Avihu unfortunately were taken as a sacrifice in order to teach the world that, no matter how special, central, and important *ahavas Hashem* is, we also need *yiras Hashem*. We can't overstep our bounds. Ironically, love itself can be a cause of sin.

E

Ahava Must Be Coupled with Yira

The Midrash expounds on the *pasuk* in our *parsha*: “*B'zos yavo Aharon el hakodesh*. Aharon has to come into the *kodesh* [*hakodashim*] in this way” (Vayikra 16:3). The Midrash teaches that aside from the strictly prescribed service, there are also ten special merits that accompany Aharon into the *kodesh hakodashim*: Torah, Shabbos, Yerushalayim, the twelve tribes, *sheivet Yehuda*,

Israel, *teruma*, *ma'aser*, *korbanos*, and *mila*. These merits are necessary. You can't just walk into that most holy place; you have to be fulfilling *mitzvos*. We have to channel our love into good things, and we need to have *yiras Hashem*, too.

The Mishna (Keilim 1:1) teaches us that there are ten levels of holiness in space, the highest of which is the *kodesh hakodashim*. Aharon enters this tenth level. The Midrash also says that there are ten kinds of Jews. Aharon is the holiest of people, the *kohen gadol*. He goes into the holiest place at the holiest time of the year, on Yom Kippur. All of this must be done with *ahava*; that's the goal. But all of this service and all of the merits that we have throughout the whole year must be coupled with fear of heaven. The fear is the foundation of the *kohen gadol's* entry into the *kodesh hakodashim* and is necessary in order to properly experience Hashem's love for His people.

We are against cold, aloof, passionless service of Hashem. We should be emotional! We should be on fire in seeking God and in our devotion to people, especially to the Jewish People. Nonetheless, we cannot let our *ahava* make us forget that we are limited flesh and blood. We can sin, and we do occasionally make mistakes. Every time we take that passionate step towards Hashem, we must feel a trepidation and hesitation, a *yiras Hashem*. The *pasuk* says *gilu bir'ada*—have that joy of dancing with God, but shake with fear while doing so (Tehillim 2:11).

F

Movements of Love

The great Rebbes have always emphasized *yiras Hashem*. We must make sure that we do the *mitzvos* properly, and we should be afraid of making mistakes and sinning. This *yira* allows our *ahavas Hashem* to burst forth in proper ways.

Christianity moved away from *yira*, dropping most of it.

Instead, it almost exclusively emphasized *ahava*, love of God and people. Christianity abandoned the *mitzvos* because it said that God only wants love. This is not true. A person has to work his way up to earn love. We see a world today that has a distorted sense of love, because there is not enough fear of heaven.

The Torah and Chassidus (the movement of love epitomized by the Ba'al Shem Tov and Reb Levi Yitzchak) also emphasize *yiras Hashem*. We cannot forget it. We must be careful not to misuse that divine love we seek and wish to express. It must go hand in hand with *yiras Hashem*.

This was the mistake of Nadav and Avihu. They thought *ahavas Hashem* is everything and that you don't need *yiras Hashem*. They mistakenly abandoned *yiras Hashem*, and paid for this mistake with their lives.

As we grow in our *ahavas Hashem*, we must remember that to be inspired and passionate, we need to balance ourselves with fear. We should love every Jew limitlessly. Yet we know our weaknesses. We cannot delude ourselves into thinking that we can handle life with unbridled love alone. We must be sure that we act within the rules and parameters of *halacha* and Shulchan Aruch. These are the dos and don'ts that help us ensure that our passions don't become distorted.

The Shem Mishmuel notes that Shabbos is a day of *ahava*, when the evil side is much weaker. If we keep the rules of Shabbos, we can express a love of Hashem and of Israel with more passion and energy than during the rest of the week. During the rest of the week, we have to be afraid of distortions brought on by the evil side. But Shabbos weakens evil, so we can express more passion in our love of Hashem, Yisrael, and Torah.

Let us hope that, one day, we will merit to see the next world of consummate love, where *ahavas Hashem* will burn as strong as fire. Everyone will be able to feel and see it without fear of the evil side distorting the energy of holy, passionate love. We will love

Hashem and His people with all of our soul, heart, and might—completely.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the mistake of Nadav and Avihu?
 2. Why did Chassidus move from limitless love to a more parochial, sectarian style?
 3. Where does Judaism differ from Christianity regarding Godly love?
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EXERCISE

1. For a week, chart your activities that express love or fear of God.

