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Machzike Hadath and Rosh Beit Midrash, Hendon

Parshah

AN ACT OF PIETY WITH TRAGIC RESULTS

In this week's *parsha* the Torah explicitly states the sin of Nadav and Avihu which led to their death. Indeed, it is repeated four times in the Torah - each time we are told that they offered an *aish zoroh* before Hashem. Granted that there is room for different explanations of this *aish zoroh* – but why do Chazal toil to find so many other sins to attribute to them when the Torah is so specific?

Paradoxically, the *midrash* says that the Torah unambiguously stated and repeated their sin so as to eliminate attribution of any other offence to these great t*zaddikim*. Moreover, we are told about their greatness. The Torah writes that Moshe knew that there would be casualties at the consecration of the *mishkan*, as a consequence of the golden calf. Moshe consoles Aharon: "this is what Hashem foretold, I will be sanctified by my nearest "בקרובי אקדש"." Rashi elaborates, "Moshe said to Aharon, Aharon my brother I knew the *bayis* would be sanctified by the close affiliates of *Hamokom*, but I thought either through myself or yourself, now I see that they are greater than myself and yourself!"

If they were so great, why do the Sages, uncharacteristically, appear to magnify their misdemeanours rather than minimise? Generally, when we are dealing with the wicked Chazal compound their felonies as with Lavan, Eisav and Bilaam, but this is not the case with the righteous.

On studying sources in the Talmud and *midrash* we find at least eleven sins attributed to Nadav and Avihu. Some say that there were four sins corresponding to the four references in the Torah and they differ as to which combination of four. Chida (Chomas Anoch) finds in the *roshei teivos* of *aish zoroh* a hint of six. Similarly, Baal Haturim sees six in an extra *vav*. There are variant understandings as to the sins, which are very briefly listed below.

1. They offered up an *aish zoroh*.
2. They were drunk.
3. They *paskened halacha* in front of Moshe.
4. They failed to consult.
5. They coveted the leadership.
6. They were celibate.
7. They entered the inner sanctum.
8. They offered incense at the wrong time.
9. They gazed inappropriately at the Divine presence.
10. They were missing a priestly garment (the *meil*).
11. They did not wash their hands and feet prior to serving.

The Taz sees in the repeated reference to their death לפני ה', in the Divine presence, a textual source for the suggestion that there was, in addition to the revealed sin, a sin which was hidden from the public. Each Rabbi gave his opinion as to the extra sin.

Keli Yokor has a different approach. He views *aish zoroh* as being the root cause of each attributed sin. Thus, intoxication is an expression of an inner fire, the missing *meil,* is an allusion to *loshon hora,* as this garment atoned for evil speech, which is connected with haughtiness, which is the trait which led to some of the other contraventions. The root cause of the lack of deference to the leadership could also be attributed to the *aish zoroh* of *gaavoh*. This would also explain their lack of inclination to marry because of their superior family ancestry. A similar line is adopted by Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky zt"l.

שמיני י:א "וַיַּקְרִיבוּ לִפְנֵי ה' אֵשׁ זָרָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוָּה אֹתָם:"

This verse could be explained in two possible ways. They offered a fire about which they had **not been commanded to bring**. Or they offered a fire about which they had been specifically **commanded not to bring**. The latter interpretation is that of the Baal Haturim.

Nadav and Avihu offered a fire before Hashem as an act of piety but this had tragic results. However sincere they may have been, since their action was unauthorised it was considered a major crime. Maybe both interpretations are alluded to in the *possuk*. Since they were not directed it was deemed as if they were positively not charged. It is considered an act of a stranger and the Torah spells out והזר הקרב יומת.

There may be a lesson in this deliberate ambiguity. Sometimes taking on board excessive duties which are not required, even with virtuous intention, can lead to disastrous consequences. It is as if the deed is not only not necessary but positively harmful, equivalent to a flagrant breach of the command of Hashem. If you are not instructed it is not absolutely clear that it is the will of Hashem and may be it is reckoned as a positive transgression to impute to Hashem what you think is the correct course of action.

Today, there are some categories of people who feel an urgent need to come close to holiness by taking on obligations which are not required by *halacha*, or by the *mesora*h as interpreted by *gedolei* Yisroel. By taking on such actions for which there is no clear authorisation, it could be they are positively committing an act of *aveiroh*.

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2. **Most of the birds are kosher. Only 24 are listed as non-kosher. Why then nowadays do we only eat a limited number of fowl?**