

satisfy himself. *Chesed* must be selfless and objective. Otherwise, it is not true *chesed*. One's devotion to his fellow must be total. I always wondered why the bird is called *chasidah* with a *hay* at the end, which usually implies the female gender. A *hay* at the end of a word has a similar connotation as a *lamed* at its beginning. Thus, *chasidah* can also mean *l'chasid* – to the *chasid*. Could the Torah be implying that this fowl is concerned only with itself; that the kindness it performs with others (of its own specie) is only for itself?

Horav Yissachar Dov, zl, m'Belz, related the following anecdote to demonstrate the lengths to which one must go in order to conform to the Torah's standards for performing *chesed*. A medical student who had successfully completed his courses and was about to commence his internship was to take a final exam. Prior to taking the written exam, he was to take an oral test based upon a conversation with the dean of the medical school. He was an exceptional student, gifted and talented, an astute and analytical thinker, who should have no problem acing the test.

The dean asked him: "How would you respond to the victim of a stabbing who is bleeding profusely?" The student replied that he would put a certain medicine on the open wound, which would stop the blood flow. "What if you do not have this medicine available?" the dean asked. "I would use an alternative salve which works just as well," the student replied. "And if you have neither the medication of choice, nor its alternative – what would you do?" asked the dean. "I would grab a piece of cloth, burn it and place its ashes on the open wound," the student quickly responded – quite satisfied with himself. "Let us hypothesize that there is no available medicine or cloth to burn – what would you do then?" the dean asked. The young would-be doctor had no answer. All options had been exhausted. Surprisingly, the dean refused to grant him access to the internship.

The young man was incredulous. He had one of the best averages in medical school. How could he be denied his degree?

The dean replied, "When a doctor cannot locate a piece of cloth/material to burn for ashes, he removes his own shirt and sets fire to it. A doctor who is not prepared to take off his own shirt to save a patient has no business in the field of medicine." This is how we should relate to the problems of our fellow Jew.

Va'ani Tefillah

סלח לנו אבינו – S'lach lanu Avinu. Forgive us, our Father.

Our fear of G-d is commensurate with our love for Him. A decrease in fear is indicative of a lessening of love. Likewise, an increase in love engenders heightened fear. The common notion that the G-d-fearing Jew is somewhat of an unhappy, somber person, perpetually in a state of religious anxiety, cannot be further from the truth. We do not walk around in a fear of being struck by lightning if we err in our service to Hashem.

Veritably, it is quite the opposite, explains *Horav Eliyahu Chaim Kaplan, zl*. A G-d-fearing person is like a loving father carrying his child on his shoulders as he dances on *Simchas Torah*. Increased dancing is indicative of increased joy. Even as these feelings of love and joy intensify, however, there is an increasing fear of dropping the child. Therefore, his love for the child and his growing fear of mishap grow together as one.

A G-d-fearing person is a happy person whose radiance and smile are palpable. He is serene, calm, at ease with himself in the knowledge that he loves Hashem and is consistently in His Heavenly embrace. He does, however, have a fear – a fear of faltering, which will undermine his incredible love. He fears dropping the "child" and injuring his relationship with Hashem. We are all Jewish children, of one Jewish Heavenly Father, Hashem, explains *Horav Avraham C. Feuer, Shlita*. Thus, we turn to our Father thrice daily petitioning Him – *S'lach lanu Avinu* – Forgive us, our Father, lest we make ourselves unworthy of Your Fatherly love.

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ישראל חיים ב"ר יצחק ז"ל

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Parashas Shemini

תשע"ז

פרשת שמייני

**בקרבי אקדש ועל פני כל העם אכבד
I will be sanctified through those who are nearest to Me, thus I will be honored before the entire People.
(10:3)**

Bikrovai ekadeish, "I will be sanctified through those nearest to Me," are two words that instill fear and awe, because they are words that are often uttered following a tragedy in which the best, those closest to Hashem, are taken from within our midst. One who is exposed to greater inspiration, to greater Heavenly illumination – whose spiritual cognition is more profound – is on a higher spiritual plane. He is nearer to Hashem; therefore, more is expected of him. *Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl*, explains that this was the reason for the punishment received by the *mekoshesh eitzim*, one who gathers twigs on *Shabbos*. True, it is *chillul Shabbos*, desecrating the *Sabbath*, but it is not as if he had been observant for that long. Why not give him a break?

Rav Zaitchik suggests that the Torah answers this question when it writes, *Vayihayu Bnei Yisrael bamidbar; "And Bnei Yisrael were in the wilderness" (Bamidbar 15:32)*. What difference does it make where they were? Does being in the desert change the sin? Yes! The nation was exposed to the greatest possible centralized *kedushah*: Moshe, Aharon, Miriam, the *Zekeinim* – they were all there – teaching, praying, talking, inspiring. What more utopian spiritual life does one require? When one is surrounded with *kedushah*, holiness, when it is palpable, the sin becomes commensurately magnified. One who is spiritually greater must act in a manner that coincides with his spiritual position.

We now understand why the punishment of Nadav and Avihu was so quick and so harsh. They had reached the epitome of *kedushah*. At that point, one's spiritual persona and demeanor must reflect his closeness to Hashem. Otherwise, he becomes an example of *bikrovai ekadeish*. Indeed, this is to be noted from the *pasuk* later in *Acharei Mos (Vayikra 16:1)*, "After the death of Aharon's two sons, when they approached (*b'karvasam*) before Hashem, and they died." Because they were so close to the Divine, they were judged with meticulous and unforgiving exactitude. As the *Abarbanel* writes, "Those who are close to Hashem are like the soldiers who fight in the fray of war, who are at the front of battle. The risk is that much greater."

The *Divrei Chaim, Horav Chaim Halberstam, zl*, of Sanz, met his close friend the *Ateres Yeshuah, zl, Rebbe* of Dzikov. These two great *Admorim* were the *ziknei ha'dor*,

elder spiritual statesmen, of their generation. The *Sanzer* complained to his friend, "Oy, where have the days gone? My beard is already white, and I have yet to repent for the sins that I committed in my youth."

The *Ateres Yeshuah* noticed that a younger man who was listening remarked, "If the holy *Sanzer* has yet to repent for the sins of his youth, then I do not have it so bad." The *Rebbe* looked at him with a sort of derision and said, "Do you know what you are saying? Do you have any idea what constitutes the sins of the *Sanzer*? His sin was thinking of a question on the *Rambam* during *Shemoneh Esrai*! His devotion to Hashem was interrupted because he could not detract his mind from Torah study. For this, he has been repenting for seventy years! Are you prepared to compare your sins to his sins?" In other words, our *mitzvos* pale in comparison with their *aveiros*.

We infer from here a new term for defining a holy, devout, righteous Jew: *karov*. The goal of religious observance should be to bring us closer to Hashem to the point that He refers to us as *Kerovi*, My close ones. From a psychological perspective, interdependence characterizes a close relationship. Obviously, someone who is close to Hashem feels dependent upon the Almighty. Hashem, of course, does not maintain that degree of closeness to us. Furthermore, interdependence in a close relationship can be experienced along three dimensions: cognitive; emotional; behavioral. Cognitively, emotional closeness means that one thinks of the other person. Emotionally, one misses the other person when they are physically apart. Behaviorally, one seeks every avenue to make the relationship a priority. While these terms describe a physical relationship between two people, there is no reason we should be any different vis-à-vis Hashem. We should depend only on Him. We crave *davening* and learning because, through these acts, we feel His Presence. Closeness to Hashem should be our priority in life. Whenever we are unable to experience this closeness, we should feel that something is missing from our lives.

In an alternative exposition of *Bikrovai Ekadeish v'al pnei ha'am Echabeid, Horav Baruch, zl, m'Komarna* taught that only those who are close to Hashem, who have achieved spiritual ascendancy, are able to accept without question what appears to be enigmatic decrees from Hashem. Everyone else, the *am*, members of the nation, have difficulty accepting what appears to be harsh decrees.

During the Holocaust, many were overcome with questions of faith. Death and deprivation was everywhere, with the Jewish people representing one large tragedy. *Ein*

bayis asher ein sham meis, “There was no home/family that had not experienced a death.” People were distraught, unable to grapple with the overwhelming issues they confronted. The *Rebbe* explained, “Following the tragic deaths of Nadav and Avihu, Hashem *Yisborach* knew that people would be overcome with questions, wondering: Is this the reward one receives for devotion to Torah? Of all people, should Aharon *HaKohen*, the individual whose love for all Jews was boundless, be the one to suffer such a tragic loss?”

Hashem said to Moshe *Rabbeinu*, *Bikrovai Ekadeish*, “By those whose belief in Me is unequivocal, who have no questions, I will be sanctified. They will understand that this was necessary to sanctify My Name. *V'al kol pnei ha'am*, but, with regard to the rest of the nation, the simple Jew, who is not yet able to grasp the larger picture, *Eichabeid*, ‘I will weigh down/become heavy with questions (from the word *kaveid*, heavy).’ They will not understand why it was specifically Aharon who sustained such an unprecedented, unparalleled loss.”

The *Rebbe* concluded, “Let us be from among those who are close to Hashem, who have no questions, who accept His decree with love.”

ראשכם אל תפרעו ובגדיכם לא תפרמו ולא תמתו...ואחיכם כל בית ישראל יבכו את השרפה אשר שרף ד'

Do not leave your heads unshorn and do not rend your garments that you not die... And your brethren the entire House of Yisrael shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited. (10:6)

Two reactions, two varied responses to the same occurrence. The *Kohanim* were not to interrupt the joy of their service – despite the tragic passing of two of their own. On the other hand, *Klal Yisrael* must mourn the deaths of two saintly *Kohanim*. The people must mourn; the *Kohanim*, however, must continue their joyful service. Two opposites – how is it possible? If it is a joyful occasion, be joyful. If it is a sad time, be sad. How do we reconcile two contradictory emotional responses to the same occurrence?

Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, *Shlita*, understands that there are vantage points from which we establish our perspective on what happened to Nadav and Avihu. One point is clear: the action taken against these two righteous sons of Aharon was not the result of *Middas HaDin*, the Attribute of Strict Justice; rather, it was a manifestation of *Kiddush Hashem*, Sanctifying Hashem's Name. Thus, it was absolutely necessary that the *Kohanim* not halt their *avodah*, service – at all. Otherwise, it would be viewed as a desecration of Hashem's Name. The service of the *Kohanim* transcends everything. As agents selected to sanctify Hashem's Name, they must remain *b'simchah*, joyful.

Although the people experienced the joyful inauguration of the *Mishkan*, they were still spectators (not agents) to a tragedy which took the lives of the young giants of Torah who perished. They needed to respect this moment with *aveilus*, mourning, the *sreifah asher saraf Hashem*, “conflagration that Hashem ignited.” Thus, we see that, concerning one experience, there can be two opposing views – and they are both proper and correct. The difference is the perspective based upon the vantage point.

Rav Gamliel notes that this phenomenon occurs in a number of instances. On *Tishah B'Av*, our national day of mourning, we do not recite the *Tachanun* prayer, since the day is referred to as a *mo'ed*, a term reserved for Festivals. Our Sages cite the *Perek*, chapter, in *Tehillim* 79, *Mizmor l'Asaf*, A Song for Asaf, a chapter that addresses the destruction of the Temple and the ensuing *galus*, exile. Why is it referred to as *mizmor*, song? It should be *kinah*, a lamentation. True, explain *Chazal*, it does depict destruction, but, concomitantly, we are happy that Hashem released His wrath primarily on *eitzim v'avanim*, wood and mortar. We were dispersed; a multitude was brutally killed – but *Klal Yisrael* as a nation survives. Amid the celebration of *Pesach* night, commemorating our release from bondage, we eat an egg, a food often eaten following a funeral. One reason for this anomaly: *Pesach Seder* always coincides with the night of the week (that year) of *Tishah B'Av*. Even when we celebrate, we should not lose sight of our tragic past – or what could occur (by G-d's decree) tomorrow.

The *avodah*, manner of service, of a Jew is to follow Hashem's will, to abrogate himself to the Divine mandate and live in accordance with that which Hashem asks of us. When we live in such a manner, giving ourselves over to His care and instruction at all times, then there are no ambiguities, no questions, no challenges. It is the will of Hashem.

A similar idea emanates from a much earlier commentator. The *Rashbam* (in his commentary to the death of Nadav and Avihu 10:3) writes: “As soon as Nadav and Avihu died, Aharon was prepared to mourn them. Moshe *Rabbeinu* immediately instructed him: ‘Do not mourn; do not weep; do not interrupt the Divine service.’ Hashem has said, *Bikrovai Ekadeish*, ‘Through My close ones I will be sanctified.’ The *Kohanim* will (be the medium to) sanctify Me among the People, when they see that, despite the tragedy, the service to Hashem continues unabated, for it transcends all. This is giving glory to Hashem – when the people see that Aharon continues his service (despite having every reason to be overwhelmed with grief).”

In his *hesped*, eulogy, on the occasion of the *Sheloshim*, thirty day mourning period, for *Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler*, *zl*, *Horav Eliyahu Lopian*, *zl*, related that, earlier, *Rav Dessler's Rebbetzin* had passed away on a *Shabbos*. *Rav Elya* came to be *menachem*, comfort him, in his grief. Despite the cloak of sadness that enveloped *Rav Dessler's* home, the *Mashgiach* (of *Ponevez*) seemed to be acting in his usual spiritually-elevated manner as per the holy *Shabbos*. *Rav Dessler* cited the *Rashbam* (mentioned above) to explain why, despite being personally absorbed in mourning over the passing of his life's companion, in addition to the fact that she was the daughter of his illustrious *rebbe* and life's mentor, he understood that *Shabbos* is *Shabbos*, and serving Hashem supersedes all.

Rav Elya wondered how is it possible to serve Hashem with joy (as evidently Aharon did) while he was overwhelmed by grief. He explained that, when one properly fulfills the *mitzvah* of *ahavas Hashem*, loving the Almighty, this love transcends all forms of opposing emotion.

Rosh Hashanah 1930, six weeks following the terrible slaughter which occurred in Yeshivas Chevron on August 18, 1929, the survivors of the Chevron massacre

gathered together with their families to *daven* in the general *vaad*, meeting hall, in Yerushalayim.

Those survivors – who had seen friends, family and students slaughtered before their eyes – were themselves physically and emotionally scarred. Their idyllic Torah life had been shattered. The atmosphere in the hall that night was heavy and emotion filled. A pall of pain and anguish permeated the room. Feelings of dejection and despair had overwhelmed many. The venerable *Mashgiach*, *Horav Yehudah Leib Chasman*, *zl*, stood up and went over to an unmarried student, *Aryeh Leib Shikovitzky*, and asked him to lead the services.

Aryeh Leib was known for his sweet tenor voice and deep emotion in song. Nonetheless, he was stunned by the *Mashgiach's* request. “*Rebbe*,” he began, “I am not married, nor I do I have a beard” (preferable requirements of a *chazzan* for the High Holy Days). The *Mashgiach* repeated his request, “I want you to lead the services.”

Aryeh Leib stepped up to lead the *davening*. With his sweet, melodious voice, he began chanting the preparatory *Rosh Hashanah* tune prior to *Barchu*. The first *bracha* (*Maariv aravim*) was completed, and now the assembly began to recite the *tefillah* of *Ahavas olam*. The *chazzan* began the phrase, *V'ahavascha al tasir mimenu l'olamim*, “And may You never remove Your love from us.” Tears choked his throat as he began to quietly weep. Again, *Aryeh Leib* repeated the words, this time accompanied by a wail. Tears streamed down his face as he repeated the phrase over and over, each time with greater pronouncement and emotion. He was intimating to Hashem: “Everything that happened to us in the recent violence, You brought upon us – with love!”

Like a burst dam, all of the accumulated pain and anguish of those assembled burst, as they all raised their voices and wept, wailing along with the *Chazzan*. *V'ahavascha al tasir mimenu l'olamim*. “We know that You love us. Please, please never remove that love from us – forever!” They had just performed *Tziduk HaDin*, Justified the Heavenly judgment, that had been meted out six weeks earlier. It was an expression of love.

The *tefillah* continued, emotion laden and tear-filled. After the conclusion of the services, the *Mashgiach* went over to *Aryeh Leib* and said, *Ot das hab ich gemeint*. “That is what I had in mind!” Concise and incisive.

Supposedly, it was that *Tefillas Maariv* that sparked the turn-around of the *yeshivah*, as it began to rebuild.

ואחיכם כל בית ישראל יבכו את השרפה אשר שרף ד' And your brethren, the entire House of Yisrael, shall bewail the conflagration which Hashem ignited. (10:6)

When we look around today at the Torah world, we are amazed that in a short period of time of some seventy years, we have gone from a nation of broken Jewry, to a world of Torah study unlike anything in previous times. While the numbers of committed, scholarly Torah Jews have probably increased with the level of Torah study and erudition achieved in our *yeshivos* unlike anything one can remember, the quality of Jewish commitment, the abrogation of materialism that bespoke the average European Jews, is no longer. We may know more and *daven*

longer and understand what we are saying, but the quality of *davening*, the commitment to Torah study – regardless of one's energy level – is remarkably different. Today, we are a far cry from the world that was. The *amcha Yid*, Jew whose belief in Hashem was simple but unequivocal, is gone. Today, everything is done with *cheshbonos*, calculations, justifications and reasons. Then, it was just done!

Obviously, I am leading up to something. In the commentary to *Parashas Shemini*, the *Yaikut Reuveni* quotes the *Zohar HaKadosh* who writes: One who lets down tears (cries) during the reading of the deaths of Aharon *HaKohen's* two sons will merit not to lose his children during his lifetime. While the deaths of Nadav and Avihu constitute an epic tragedy, why does it take center stage to all of the other tragedies that our nation has sustained throughout its tumultuous history?

Speaking about the void left following the Holocaust, the *Ponevezer Rav*, *zl*, asked this question. He cited the *Midrash* which quotes Moshe *Rabbeinu* as implying that Nadav and Avihu had achieved a spiritual plateau greater even than that of Moshe and Aharon. With this in mind, taking into consideration that Nadav and Avihu died at a relatively young age, had they lived full lives, their spiritual level would have been accordingly way beyond that of Moshe and Aharon. A leader has a profound spiritual influence on his generation. The greater the leader, the more exalted is his generation. Every generation descends spiritually from its forebears. Thus, had Nadav and Avihu lived, their generation would have achieved an even greater plateau than it did under Moshe and Aharon. So the void left by their early demise is felt by each ensuing generation, which is that much less spiritually accomplished due to the premature loss to our people that they experienced.

With this in mind, let us just for a moment imagine the immeasurable spiritual void left by the loss of the pre-World War II generation of European Jewry. Thus, whatever we have achieved is nothing – absolutely nothing – to what we would have attained had that tragedy not occurred. That is a sobering thought which should impact our approach to *Yiddishkeit*. Not only are we not as great as we think – we are not remotely close to what we could have been!

ואת החסידה ואת החסידה (11:19)

An interesting name for a non-kosher fowl. *Rashi* adds to the ambiguity with his reason for the name *chasidah*. This bird performs kindness with others of its species by sharing food with them. This is supposedly a compassionate bird, because it shares. Furthermore, its compassion is even noted by its given name – all the more reason that it should be included among the kosher birds. The *Chassidic* Masters explains that selective *chesed* with one's own species, while ignoring the plight of other species, is far from admirable. Jews are not exclusive in their *chesed* activities. We help everyone. This bird's name acknowledges its acts of kindness to its own species. Nonetheless, the name does not change the fact that its acts of kindness are flawed. This teaches us that that the reputation one enjoys might not always tell the whole story.

When one's *chesed* is selective, he is acting only to