

Sedra Highlight

- Dr Jacob Solomon

Acharei

G-d spoke to Moshe after the death of the two sons of Aharon... (16:1-2).

Where the Torah, and for that matter the Navi, tells us about disaster, they typically follow up with words of encouragement, words of hope, and words pointing out the best way to move forward. After the Cheit HaEigel, Am Yisrael engaged in MELECHET HA-MISHKAN as they joined together to construct a place that was fitting for the Shechina to rest. After the Cheit HaMeraglim and the sentence of 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, G-d reassured them that they will eventually enter the Land and tells them of the mitzot that will apply there. After the events of Korach's rebellion and its aftermath, G-d reassures the Kohanim and Leviyim of their distinguished and sacred roles in matters holy, firmly and absolutely excluding outsiders and interlopers without exception.

The same happens with the death of Nadav and Avihu, the two elder sons of Aharon. Following their death through offering a 'strange fire', G-d instructs the detailed, correct way for the Kohen Gadol, and only the Kohen Gadol to come in to the Kodesh Kodashim together with the procedures for entry into the most sacred, innermost section with the specially prepared Ketoret. But there is a difference. With Cheit HaEigel, there

was disaster to remedy, to making things better. Without interruption. In contrast, there is a big gap between the deaths of Nadav and Avihu and the laws of entry to the Kodesh Kodashim, that gap is dominated by the laws of kashrut and the laws of tzaraat.

Perhaps, the reason for this gap is because the Kohen Gadol's entry into Kodesh HaKodashim had an additional purpose; a purpose that didn't just involve him, but the whole of Klal Yisrael. For this ceremony was the focal point of the entire community during his once-a-year entry on Yom Kippur, as long as the Beit HaMikdash was standing and functioning. "He shall effect atonement... for all of Klal Yisrael" (16:17). Yom Kippur, as the Rambam emphasizes (based on a range of much earlier sources) brings kapara with teshuva. Teshuva places great demands on individuals and the whole community.

And the directions teshuva has to take are hinted in the areas that the Torah presents between the death of Nadav and Avihu, and the view forward: the way the Kodesh Kodashim should be approached. Am Yisrael have to prepare themselves for teshuva in two fundamental areas.

First, in midot: our sources indicate that tzaraat flows from three particularly evil, but all-too-common bad traits. These are desire to speak negative things about other people, desire for kavod and haughtiness, and desire for things not

designated for us, a.k.a. greed. Common to all groups is small-mindedness. Such individuals feel ill-will towards the situation and possessions of others. Instead of seeking to belittle and exploit, they need to do teshuva by adjusting their mindset towards seeking to help and seeking to positively develop themselves and the positive potential in others.

Secondly, in self-control: represented by two areas, laws of kashrut and laws of nida. It is the very considerable exercises in disciplining our instincts in these very fundamental areas of human activity that give us the control of our own lives to make the right decisions at the right time even if they are painful in the short term. Teshuva can only work when the desire to repent is supported by exercise of self-control when placed in the same situation again.

So it could be argued that there is no gap between the deaths of Nadav and Avihu and the Torah's instructions for the right way of entry to the Kodesh Kodashim on Yom Kippur. The contents in the middle are part of the sequence in showing the direction for teshuva within Klal Yisrael for Yom Kippur and all that goes with it to have full meaning and full effect...

