

## From the K'li Yakar Jacob Solomon

Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu, each took his fire pan, placed fire on it, and then incense on it... and they brought before G-d eish zara, unauthorized fire which G-d did not instruct them to offer. Fire went forth from G-d and consumed them; they died before G-d (10:1-2).

The commentators discuss the precise reasons for the deaths of Nadav and Avihu at length. The Sifra states that they erred in bringing their own ketoret (frankincense) before G-d, meaning into the holiest parts of the Mishkan - forbidden territory. The Ramban gives the explanation that they offered the regular daily ketoret on the Inner Altar, the mizbach ha-zahav, when they had not been commanded to do so.

Rashi, however, quotes various traditions from Eruvin 63a which are not explicit in the text: that they impinged on Moshe's authority in giving a Halachic decision in his presence (R. Eliezer), and that they entered the Sanctuary under the influence of wine (R. Yishmael). Elsewhere, Sanhedrin 52a brings a different tradition, whereby Nadav remarked to Avihu that they themselves would lead the Israelites once the 'old men' Moshe and Aharon died. Whereupon G-d rejoined with "We will see who will bury whom."

The K'li Yakar examines how these traditions fit into the text that quite

clearly states that their deaths were in consequence of: "eish zara, which G-d did not instruct them to offer". The K'li Yakar does not explain eish zara as simply meaning 'unauthorized fire', but more specifically as 'fire brought in unacceptable circumstances'. Zar means strange, not fitting in. It was their element of arrogance, reflected in showing disrespect for Moshe's authority, planning their take-over as Moshe and Aharon's successors, or entering the holiest parts of the Mishkan under the influence of alcohol that made their fire offering strange and quite unacceptable.

This becomes all the clearer when contrasted with their father, Aharon. Earlier, Moshe had to persuade Aharon with "Approach the Altar and perform the service of your sin offering and burnt offering as G-d has commanded" (9:7).

Rashi explains that the persuasion was necessary: Aharon was ashamed to approach the Altar, very likely because of his feelings of guilt over his connection with the Cheit HaEigel. (c.f. Rashi to 9:2). The Degel Machanei Efrayim comments: "It is because you show shame that you have been chosen for this task: G-d despises the proud".

Nadav and Avihu did not show such shyness and modesty. They offered an eish zara when they themselves showed unacceptable attitude and behavior. Where: in the interior of the Mishkan, where the Sh'china was most

intense. When: in the public ceremony of the inauguration of the Mishkan, when "fire came forth from G-d and consumed the burnt offering... the people saw, raised their voices in praise, and threw themselves on their faces." In the circumstances this was an unacceptable display of familiarity with G-d.

This is a crucial message to those serving in Jewish public positions today. Unacceptable attitude and behavior towards those they represent creates a Chilul HaShem, an act that brings the service towards G-d into disrepute. For as is well-known, the public tends to judge the cause of Torah according to the conduct of its representatives. 📖