

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt”l

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Parshios Acharei – Kedoshim

“AND HASHEM SPOKE TO MOSHE AFTER THE DEATH OF AHARON’S TWO SONS...” (VAYIKRA 16:1)

The bodies of Nadav and Avihu were in the most sacred part of the Mishkan

THE MIDRASH on this week’s *parasha* (Vayikra Rabbah 20:4) explains Moshe’s instructions to remove the bodies of Aharon’s sons. According to the Midrash, the bodies of Nadav and Avihu – Aharon’s sons – were in the most sacred part of the Mishkan, the Holy of Holies (see Eitz Yosef *ibid.*). Moshe called upon Aharon’s cousins, Mishael and Eltzafan, to remove the bodies “from the face of the *kodesh*” (Vayikra 10:4). The Midrash points out that the *pasuk* doesn’t state that Moshe asked them to remove the bodies, “from before the *aron*” – the Holy Ark, but rather to remove the bodies, “from before the holy one” – from before Aharon HaKohen. The Midrash equates this to saying, “Remove the deceased from the presence of this mourner; how long is this mourner to suffer?”

The pain of Aharon should be a secondary consideration

It seems, from the Midrash, that Moshe’s primary reason for removing the bodies was to reduce Aharon’s pain. Wasn’t there a much more pressing reason to remove the bodies? They were in the spiritual heart of the Mishkan. After the soul leaves, the lifeless body carries the most severe form of spiritual impurity, and these two corpses were resting in the holiest place in the universe. What a terrible desecration of Hashem’s honor! Moshe was surely consumed with a powerful drive to restore the purity and holiness of the *Kodesh HaKodashim*, and every fiber of his being wanted to take action to remove this impurity. The pain of Aharon, a single individual, should be a secondary consideration in the face of the terrible desecration of the Mishkan that was taking place.

We find Hashem often described as good, kind, and merciful, but nowhere as being pious or “frum”

In addition, Aharon’s sons were dead and Mishael and Eltzafan’s action would only slightly reduce Aharon’s suffering. Why did Moshe feel that this small percentage of healing was so much more important than even the *chillul Hashem* of having corpses in the Mishkan?

We tend to associate spiritual greatness with acts between man and Hashem: prayers, fasting, self-denial and similar deeds. The *mitzvos* that deal with relating to our fellow man somehow get downgraded to a lower priority. In reality, they are at least of equal importance, and in some ways the interpersonal *mitzvos* are the highest form of spirituality one can achieve. The classic example is the elaborate description the Torah gives to Avraham’s *chessed*, while completely ignoring his self-sacrifice to avoid idolatry at the furnace of Ur Kasdim. Our most perfect emulation of Hashem, explained the Alter of Slabodka, is when we perform *chessed*, not by martyrdom. In a similar vein, the Alter’s close *talmid*, Reb Dovid Leibowitz, zt”l, used to point out that we find Hashem often described as Good, Kind, and Merciful, but nowhere as being pious or *frum*. From this Midrash we see the same concept: Moshe’s greatest concern was Aharon’s feelings and how he could lessen, even slightly, Aharon’s pain.

It can sometimes be very tempting to focus on outward actions of serving Hashem at the expense of other people’s feelings. We can get too absorbed in our “own” *mitzvos* and not notice the suffering of others. The Torah here is teaching us that sensitivity to our fellow man is more important than removing the most severe violation of impurity from the holiest place in the world. May we strive to keep our eyes, ears and hearts open to notice when other Jews are in pain or difficulty, and seize the opportunity to emulate Hashem with our kindness and compassion.