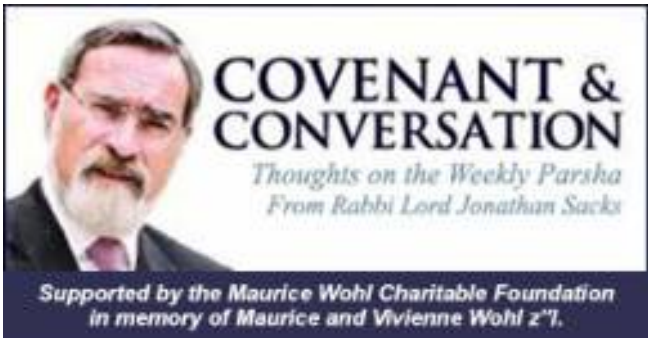
In this Issue



Reticence vs. Impetuosity

It should have been a day of joy. The Israelites had completed the Mishkan, the Sanctuary. For seven days Moses had made preparations for its consecration.[1] Now on the eighth day – the first of Nissan (Ex. 10:2), one year to the day since the Israelites had received their first command two weeks prior to the Exodus – the service of the Sanctuary was about to begin. The Sages say that it was in heaven the most joyous day since Creation (Megillah 10b).

But tragedy struck. The two elder sons of Aaron "offered a strange fire that had not been commanded" (Lev. 10:1) and the fire from heaven that should have consumed the sacrifices consumed them as well. They died. Aaron's joy turned to mourning. *Vayidom Aharon*, "And Aaron was silent (10:3). The man who had been Moses' spokesman could not longer speak. Words turned to ash in his mouth.

There is much in this episode that is hard to understand, much that has to do with the concept of holiness and the powerful energies it released that, like nuclear power today, could be deadly dangerous if not properly used. But there is also a more human story about two approaches to leadership that still resonates with us today.

First there is the story about Aaron. We read about how Moses told him to begin his role as High Priest. "Moses [then] said to Aaron, 'Approach the altar, and prepare your sin offering and burnt offering, thus atoning for you and the people. Then prepare the people's offering to atone for them, as God has commanded'" (Lev. 9:7).

The Sages sensed a nuance in the words, "Approach the altar," as if Aaron was standing at a distance from it, reluctant to come near. They said: "Initially Aaron was ashamed to come close. Moses said to him, 'Do not be ashamed. This is what you have been chosen to do.'"[2]

Why was Aaron ashamed? Tradition gave two explanations, both brought by Nachmanides in his commentary to the Torah. The first is that Aaron was simply overwhelmed with trepidation at coming so close to the Divine Presence. The second is that Aaron, seeing the "horns" of the altar, was reminded of the Golden Calf, his great

sin. How could he, who had played a key role in that terrible event, now take on the role of atoning for the people's sins? That surely demanded an innocence he no longer had. Moses had to remind him that it was precisely to atone for sins that the altar had been made; and the fact that he had been chosen by God to be High Priest was an unequivocal sign that he had been forgiven.

There is perhaps a third explanation, albeit less spiritual. Until now Aaron had been in all respects second to Moses. Yes, he had been at his side throughout, helping him speak and lead. But there is vast psychological difference between being second-in-command and being a leader in your own right. We probably all know examples of people who quite readily serve in an assisting capacity but who are terrified at the prospect of leading on their own.

Whichever explanation is true – and perhaps they all are – Aaron was reticent at taking on his new role, and Moses had to give him confidence. "This is what you have been chosen to do."

The other story is the tragic one, of Aaron's two sons, Nadav and Avihu, who "offered a strange fire, that had not been commanded." The Sages offered several readings of this episode, all based on a close reading of the several places in the Torah where their death is referred to. Some said they had been drinking alcohol.[3] Others said that they were arrogant, holding themselves up above the community; this was the reason they had never married.[4]

Some say that they were guilty of giving a halachic ruling about the use of man-made fire, instead of asking their teacher Moses whether it was permitted (Eruvin 63a). Others say they were restless in the presence of Moses and Aaron. They said: when will these two old men die and we can lead the congregation? (Sanhedrin 52a)

However we read the episode, it seems clear that they were all too eager to exercise leadership. Carried away by their enthusiasm to play a part in the inauguration, they did something they had not been commanded to do. After all, had Moses not done something entirely on his own initiative, namely breaking the tablets when he came down the mountain and saw the Golden Calf? If he could act spontaneously, why not they?

They forgot the difference between a Priest and a Prophet. As we have seen in previous *Covenant & Conversations*, a Prophet lives and acts in time – in this moment that is unlike any other. A Priest acts and lives in eternity, by following a set of rules that never change. Everything about "the holy," the realm of the Priest, is precisely scripted in advance. The holy is the place where God, not man, decides.

Nadav and Avihu failed fully to understand that there are different kinds of leadership and they are not interchangeable. What is appropriate to one may be radically inappropriate to another. A judge is not a politician. A King is not a Prime Minister. A religious leader is not a celebrity seeking popularity. Confuse these roles and not only will you fail, you will also damage the very office you were chosen to hold.

The real contrast here, though, is the difference between Aaron and his two sons. They were, it seems, opposites. Aaron was over-cautious and

had to be persuaded by Moses even to begin. Nadav and Avihu were not cautious enough. So keen were they to put their own stamp on the role of priesthood that their impetuosity was their downfall.

These are, perennially, the two challenges leaders must overcome. The first is the reluctance to lead. Why me? Why should I get involved? Why should I undertake the responsibility and all that comes with it – the high levels of stress, the sheer volume of work, and the neverending criticisms leaders always have to face? Besides which, there are other people better qualified and more suited than I am.

Even the greatest were reluctant to lead. Moses at the Burning Bush found reason after reason to show that he was not the man for the job. Isaiah and Jeremiah both felt inadequate. Summoned to lead, Jonah ran away. The challenge really is daunting. But when you feel as if you are being called to a task, if you know that the mission is necessary and important, then there is nothing you can do but say, *Hineni*, "Here I am." (Ex. 3:4) In the words of a famous book title, you have to "feel the fear and do it anyway."[5]

The other challenge is the polar opposite. There are some people who see themselves as rightful leaders. They are convinced that they can do it better than anyone else. We recall the famous remark of Israel's first President, Chaim Weizmann, that he was head of a nation of a million presidents.

From a distance it seems so easy. Isn't it obvious that the leader should do X, not Y? Homo sapiens contains many back seat drivers who know better than those whose hands are on the steering wheel. Put them in a position of leadership and they can do great damage. Never having sat in the driver's seat, they have no idea of how many considerations have to be taken into account, how many voices of opposition have to be overcome, how difficult it is at one and the same time to cope with the pressures of events while not losing sight of long-term ideals and objectives. The late John F. Kennedy said that the worst shock on being elected President was that "when we got to the White House we discovered that things were as bad as we'd been saying they were." Nothing prepares you for the pressures of leadership when the stakes are high.

Overenthusiastic, overconfident leaders can do great harm. Before they became leaders they understood events through their own perspective. What they did not understand is that leadership involves relating to many perspectives, many interest groups and points of view. That does not mean that you try to satisfy everyone. Those who do so end up satisfying no one. But you have to consult and persuade. Sometimes you need to honour precedent and the traditions of a particular institution. You have to know exactly when to behave as your predecessors did, and when not to. All this calls for considered judgement, not wild enthusiasm in the heat of the moment.

Nadav and Avihu were surely great people. The trouble was that they believed they were great people. They were not like their father Aaron, who had to be persuaded to come close to the altar because of his sense of inadequacy. The one thing Nadav and Avihu lacked was a sense of their own inadequacy.[6]

To do anything great we have to be aware of these two temptations. One is the fear of greatness: who am I? The other is being convinced of your greatness: Who are they? I can do it better. We can do great things if (a) the task matters more than the person, (b) we are willing to do our best without thinking ourselves superior to others, and (c) we are willing to take advice, the thing Nadav and Avihu failed to do.

People do not become leaders because they are great. They become great because they are willing to serve as leaders. It does not matter that we think ourselves inadequate. Moses did. So did Aaron. What matters is the willingness, when challenge calls, to say, *Hineni*, "Here I am."

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

1. Why did the 1st Nissan begin as such a joyous day?
2. Would you have more confidence in a reticent leader or an impetuous leader?
3. Do either of these two extremes affect you in other areas of life, even when not playing a leadership role?

NOTES

1. As described in Exodus 40.
2. Rashi to Lev. 9:7, quoting Sifra.
3. Vayikra Rabbah 12:1; Ramban to Lev. 10:9.
4. Vayikra Rabbah 20:10.
5. Susan Jeffers, *Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway*, Ballantine Books, 2006.
6. The composer Berlioz once said of a young musician: "He knows everything. The one thing he lacks is inexperience."

You Are What You Eat

One of the distinguishing practices of Jewish observance is the distinct set of dietary considerations that constitutes the laws of kashrut.

In the early chapters of the Torah, the prohibition against eating any part of a live animal is introduced – not as a "Jewish" law, but rather as a universal practice. Later, in the chapters that detail the formation of the Jewish People, the law requiring separation between milk and meat – specifically, the commandment not to "cook a kid in its mother's milk" – is repeated several times. Subsequently, prohibitions against the consumption of blood and certain fats were added.

In the book of Vayikra, in Parashat Shmini, we are presented with a long and detailed list of prohibited and permitted animals, fowl and fish. The list is not accompanied by any explanatory verses; all of the laws of kashrut are given without rhyme or reason. These particular laws are generally characterized by the term "*chok*" or statute, a biblical term used to denote a decree, something beyond the constructs of human logic – the type of law that man never would have

intuited or created in the context of the "social contract."

The propriety or even the permissibility of searching for reasons for such laws is debated among the commentaries; we are, by definition, incapable of understanding God's motives in creating these laws. On the other hand, many of our greatest sages encouraged all those who observe these laws to enhance their understanding of them from the human perspective: Rather than asking **why** God decreed that our diet should be governed by these specific rules, rather than asking **how** these laws affect us and our world, we are encouraged to approach *hukim* (Divine decrees) from the perspective of the adherent, and to ask, **what** is the spiritual message for me?[1] Subservience to laws of this type may constitute what Kierkegaard labeled a "leap of faith," but the subjective religious experience of the practitioner lies in the realm of the individual's intellectual, emotional and spiritual engagement with the mitzvah.

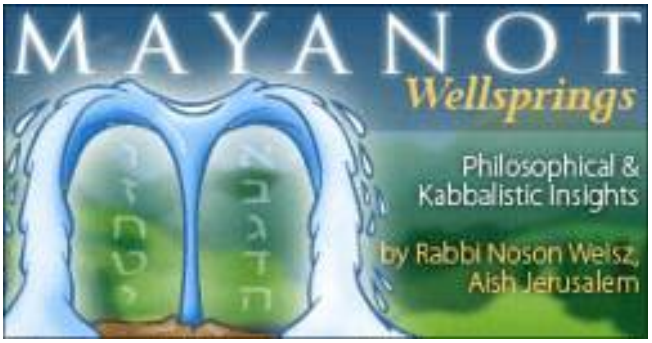
Dietary laws illustrate this distinction: The prohibition against eating a severed limb from a live animal (or, for that matter, severing a limb from a live animal), should require no explanation. Human decency recoils at the very thought of such barbaric behavior, and we require no symbolic interpretation for this universal prohibition. On the other hand, the prohibition against mixing milk and meat is not intrinsically repugnant in this way, and requires us to consider less literal levels of meaning: Milk is symbolic of the flow of life from mother to child. Although the Torah does permit us to eat meat, and, unavoidably, to take the life of an animal for this purpose, there are limitations that must be respected. The prohibition against mixing milk and meat implies that the flow of life symbolized by milk is incongruous with the consumption of flesh. To combine the two is to create an incongruity that dulls our sensitivity. Thus, although the law is transmitted without a rationale, the symbolism involved in this law speaks to the human condition. We do not ask what God's rationale is, nor do we examine the physical affects and outcomes of observance or non-observance. Instead, we discern a deeper message that impacts our inner spiritual world, and, at the same time, brings us closer to the Creator.

In this same way, we may now approach the laws in Parashat Shmini. The list of animals and birds that are deemed unkosher includes carnivorous species: Although eating meat is allowed, the animals we eat should be herbivores and not carnivores. Additionally, we are permitted to eat only fish that have scales and fins. On a functional level, fins serve an interesting purpose: They allow fish to swim upstream, against the tide.

Perhaps these seemingly arbitrary sets of markers contain a great spiritual message: We are what we eat. We must be careful about the food we ingest, because it becomes a part of us, not only biologically, but also spiritually. Although we are permitted to eat meat, this should not be our defining trait. Furthermore, perhaps fish is an important part of our diet not only because it is a healthy source of protein, but because of the defining characteristic embodied in the signs of their kashrut: their ability to swim against the

tide. This same ability has been a defining trait and an invaluable skill for Jews throughout history. Just as the laws of kashrut have, to a great extent, secured our identity as a separate people, our ability to swim against the tide has insured that we are not pulled by the shifting tides of time and fashion into oblivion.

1. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik discussed this distinction at length. An adaptation of some of The Rav's lectures on this topic may be found in Chapter 10 of Abraham Besdin's **Man of Faith in the Modern World: Reflections of the Rav, vol. 2** (1989: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., Hoboken N.J.).



Holy Physics

This week's Torah portion Shmini confronts us with the attribute of Divine justice in its harshest and most unforgiving aspect – the phenomenon of the death of the righteous.

Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aaron, who are presented by the Talmud (Sanhedrin, 52a) as the most worthy replacements of Moses and Aaron in the entire Congregation of Israel, are consumed by a fire of God while engaged in an act of Divine service. It is the final day of the eight-day celebration marking the inauguration of the Tabernacle, and the incident pierces the bubble of Israel's national joy at its very maximum point of inflation.

In describing their deaths, Moses speaks the following words of consolation to his brother Aaron their father:

> *Of this did God speak, saying; "I will be sanctified through those who are nearest Me, thus I will be honored before the entire people..."* (Leviticus 10:3)

This the Talmud (Zevochim 116b) interprets to signify: God had earlier informed Moses that His Tabernacle would have to be sanctified by the deaths of those nearest to Him. Moses had thought that he and Aaron would have to die to accomplish this act of sanctification, as he had thought that they were the nearest to God. When he saw that it was Nadav and Avihu whose lives were taken on the inauguration day, he realized that in certain respects they must have been even nearer to God than he and Aaron. Thus he was consoling Aaron by informing him how precious his children must have been in God's eyes for them to have merited being selected for this act of sanctification.

> Why do we continue to live on peacefully while the attribute of Divine justice strikes down the holiest?

The Talmud goes on to explain how this sanctification of God's name is brought about by the deaths of the *tzadikim.* When God carries out His judgment against the righteous, His Name becomes more awesome because the average Jew says to himself, if this could happen to such holy

people, who clearly deserve such harsh treatment far less than the rest of us, how much more must we all be deserving of even harsher treatment. The fact that we continue to live on peacefully while the attribute of Divine justice strikes down the holiest is only due to God's attribute of mercy.

The Midrash (Tanchuma, Achrei Mos 10) presents the next step in the application of this same thought. Why does the Torah describe the deaths of the sons of Aaron in connection to the laws of the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16)? To teach us that just as the Day of Atonement was given to us so that we can be cleansed of our sins, the deaths of the righteous also atone for our sins and mend the damaged relationship between the Jewish people and Israel. Indeed, the Zohar (Vol 2, 56a) suggests that that is why we read this portion of the Torah on the Day of Atonement; the deaths of Nadav and Avihu help to atone for Jewish sins down to the very present.

How can we relate to this idea? How can we understand that the death or suffering of the righteous can atone for our shortcomings? Is there any sense to this?

THE DEATH OF RABBI PINCUS

Unfortunately, I address this topic of the death of the righteous not from the calmness and distance afforded by philosophical or historical perspective, but from the traumatic shock that was the aftermath of a public tragedy. Nadav and Avihu lived very long ago, but two days before Passover several years ago, I attended the funeral of Rabbi Shimshon Pincus, his wife and his child whose lives had been snuffed out in a tragic car accident.

Rabbi Pincus was 56. He and his wife were both people who lived only for others without any thought for themselves. Rabbi Pincus' holy fire had helped to ignite the spark of holiness dormant in many Jewish hearts. His own life and that of his wife were dedicated entirely to acts of kindness and teaching.

Rabbi Weintraub, the teacher of Rabbi Pincus, caused a statement to be issued at the funeral informing the public that Shimshon Pincus, the private individual had ceased to exist many years earlier, because for the last decades of his life, Rabbi Pincus existed only for the public. All his life decisions were made as though he were a living personification of the Jewish people.

The inner storm caused by his tragic and untimely death provides the background of this essay.

A PUBLIC TRAGEDY

The key to unraveling the Torah's approach to the phenomenon of the death of the righteous begins with another statement of Moses to Aaron.

> *Moses said to Aaron and to his sons Elazar and Ithamar, "Do not leave your heads unshorn and do not rend your garments that you do not die and He become wrathful with the entire assembly; and your brethren the entire House of Israel shall bewail the conflagration that God ignited."*
> (Leviticus 10:6)

Moses is saying here that the deaths of Nadav and Avihu are not to be regarded as private tragedies. If they are treated as such, if Nadav and Avihu are mourned primarily by their family, as is the usual custom, this will provoke God's anger against the

entire Jewish people. The Jewish people must understand that these deaths were primarily a national calamity that they suffered as a people, and therefore they must be mourned as such. The entire nation must go into mourning.

The failure to come to this recognition renders their deaths futile. They did not deserve to die as private individuals, they died only as members of the community whose deaths were suffered for the sake of others. If the community appreciates this and takes it to heart, and consequently experiences a spiritual awakening, then their deaths were not in vain. But if Aaron and his sons are allowed to mourn them as though this were their own private tragedy, the community is held responsible for their very deaths. Rendering the tragedy they experienced futile is tantamount to taking their lives.

UNIVERSITY VS. YESHIVA

The closest metaphor that comes to mind to help explain all these ideas comes from the field of education. First let us consider a phenomenon that is familiar to all of us. However uncomfortable we may be with the idea, we all know that some universities are superior to others. Someone with a degree from Oxford or Harvard is regarded differently than someone who received his education in the University of Manchester or Kansas. Although there is no doubt some correspondence between superior levels of I.Q. and highly regarded Ivy League universities, this perceived difference in the value of the education received has little to do with the levels of raw intelligence, and is far more attributable to the different "cultures" prevailing at these institutions of learning.

The more established Ivy League universities tend to have the better professors and the more ambitious and motivated students. The courses tend to be on a higher level and the greater intellectual demands tend to bring out more of the scholastic potential inherent in their student bodies. Although the level of overall intellectual capacity is not much different than in less hallowed institutions of higher learning, the level of achievement tends to be higher. Even a gifted student will tend to accomplish more if he attends an Ivy League university than he would by attending his local city college. There is a "culture" of excellence that pressures everyone in the prestigious Ivy League university to achieve his utmost.

> It is easy to see how this "culture" of excellence could be squandered in a relatively short period.

It is easy to see how this "culture" of excellence could be squandered in a relatively short period. If retiring faculty members were replaced by more mediocre people, and if its student body were selected without regard to potential excellence, and if degrees were offered in basket weaving and the like, the best Ivy League university would rapidly lose its cutting edge and reputation, and drop to the level of its less illustrious sisters in Academia. Excellence is not a self-perpetuating phenomenon. You have to work at maintaining it.

Now let us move on to an educational metaphor that may be less familiar to many readers, the

Jewish institution of higher learning known as the Yeshiva. The Yeshiva has to accomplish what every university has to accomplish and much more besides. Not only does it have to transmit the body of Jewish knowledge and culture to the next generation of Jews, the Yeshiva is also the primary mechanism for the formation of the deep personal bond with God necessary to carry the student through an entire life of holiness, as well as providing a well spring of inspiration for his eventual descendants. The Yeshiva must be able to transmit a powerful sense of the sanctity of the Jewish people and its unique bond with God along with the knowledge of Torah, so that a familiarity with holiness becomes part of the furniture of the souls of its students.

An atmosphere of holy tension is just as essential a component of the successful Yeshiva as the culture of intellectual excellence. If the "culture" of intellectual excellence is itself difficult to maintain, just imagine the complication of keeping it fresh and vigorous while at the same time developing and maintaining a spirit of holy tension.

The university tends to stay out of its students personal lives and has little interest in their relationships or moral standards. In fact, a focus on these matters would hamper the free interchange of ideas that is the foundation of the spirit of intellectual excellence that pervades the atmosphere. But the Yeshiva cannot afford to ignore the private aspects of its students' lives. The atmosphere of holiness that must be maintained within the Yeshiva's halls is extremely fragile and delicate, and it takes the highest standards of moral and religious behavior to maintain it.

Yeshivas often have to resort to dramatic gestures, such as expulsion of certain students, in order to maintain the atmosphere of holiness without which they cannot function.

EXPELLING A GOOD STUDENT

Let us imagine the following theoretical scenario. A group of new students, used to the looser, tension-free atmosphere of the mostly secular world they are coming from, goes to town and spends the evening in a bar where some of the students become quite rowdy. While this is perfectly understandable behavior given their backgrounds, and while they are all nice boys from decent families who would no doubt adjust to the spirit of holiness in time, such behavior cannot be ignored by the Yeshiva administration. The boys would adjust to the spirit of holiness only if the Yeshiva were able to maintain it during their period of adjustment, but such behavior is precisely what shatters the atmosphere of holiness for everyone in the Yeshiva.

The group of unruly students bring the atmosphere of the pub back with them to the Yeshiva, and until the spiritual fog this atmosphere introduces is dispelled, the clear light of holiness generally available in the Yeshiva to inspire its students is dimmed, regardless of their individual state of readiness to assimilate to a holy atmosphere. Just as in the case of the weather, the prevailing spiritual temperature is shared by all. When this happens some action must be taken. Some student or sometimes a number of students have to be expelled. When

they leave, the poisoned air of the street leaves with them.

> Expulsion of a student is always difficult. Whom do you pick?

Selection is always difficult. If expulsion is absolutely necessary, it is obviously preferable to expel as few as possible. So whom do you pick? Do you send away the student who has the most potential and is among the stronger in the first year group, who was probably not a ringleader in the expedition in any case, or do you send away the weaker student who has the greater tendency to rowdiness, and who might have been the one who dreamed up the unfortunate episode in the first place?

You usually expel the best student. Why?

As the object is the restoration of the atmosphere of holiness, it most often turns out that for the benefit of everyone the most logical course of behavior is to expel the student you would least want to expel. It is his expulsion that makes the greatest impact on the student body and has the greatest effect in terms of restoring the necessary holy tension that must be present in order for the Yeshiva to benefit anyone. If you make an example of him, generally the expulsion of a single student will suffice. He is also the most likely to be able to find another place without considerable difficulty, and in the long run is likely to make the most complete spiritual recovery.

DEATH OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Bearing this metaphor in mind, we are ready to look once again at the death of the righteous. When God withdraws or "expels" the righteous, He is not sending a message to the non-believer. The non-believer will regard the phenomenon as yet another justification for his rejection of the concept of Divine Providence. The message in this act of expulsion is clearly addressed directly to the believer who knows that he is witnessing an act of God.

In fact, God is attacking the spirit of complacency. The House of Israel, to which Moses refers, is similar in many respects to the Yeshiva of our metaphor. It also must maintain a spirit of holy tension in order to function. When the Tabernacle is inaugurated, there is a great danger that spiritual complacency will be an unintended by-product of this new familiarity with God. The tendency is to think: "We Jews must really be all right. After all, we are so holy that God Himself feels comfortable inhabiting one of the tents of our encampment."

In fact, the "tragic flaws" in Nadav and Avihu that are pointed out by the rabbis as being responsible for their deaths all stem from a feeling of complacency:

1. They decided on matters of Torah law in the presence of their teacher Moses. (Talmud, Eruvin 63a) Without consulting him, they ruled that it was permissible to bring a private fire offering into the Holy of Holies. Had Nadav and Avihu entertained any doubts as to the correctness of their opinion, they certainly would have asked Moses what the law was. Their failure to do so is indicative of an unacceptable degree of cockiness.

2. They went into the Holy of Holies after having drunk wine. (Leviticus Raba, 12:1) No one implies that they were drunk. The inauguration day was a holiday. On a Jewish holiday it is the custom to eat meat and drink some wine along with the meals to help foster a joyful atmosphere. Their offering of incense in the Holy of Holies was an expression of the overflow of their joy. This also indicates excess familiarity. The Holy of Holies can only be approached with an abundance of awe.
3. The very act of unauthorized entry described by the verse itself implies an overabundance of familiarity:

> *The sons of Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, each took his fire pan, they put fire in them and placed incense upon it; and they brought before God an alien fire that He had not commanded them.* (Leviticus 10:1)

This feeling of being too familiar with God found in the hearts of the most righteous is no doubt indicative of a general attitude of complacency in the House of Israel. The Tabernacle was not meant to lessen the spiritual tension necessary for spiritual growth, but to foster the very opposite, an atmosphere of sanctity into the Jewish encampment. Thus, in light of the spirit of complacency prevailing in the encampment, no one was able to accomplish what God had intended.

In other words, "the Yeshiva of Israel" was not functioning. Under the circumstances someone had to be expelled to restore the proper atmosphere. Again, the rule is always to accomplish the task with the expulsion of the smallest numbers and yet with the maximum effect. Only the righteous will serve.

A STRONG MESSAGE

Judaism maintains that life in this world is only a means to an end. We are here to accomplish, this is not our place of reward. For some of us this idea is little more than lip service. For others it is an intellectual construct that makes sense, but does not penetrate to the level of feelings. For people of the stature of Nadav and Avihu, it is as elementary as the sunrise.

By submitting to their "expulsion" from the Yeshiva of life, they established the proper atmosphere of dynamic tension that was required to render the Tabernacle (and the Temples that later replaced it) fully spiritually operational. It is through them that the Tabernacle became properly sanctified. With their deaths they constructed the House of God for the House of Israel. They went out in a blaze of glory.

> The death of Rabbi Pincus was meant to shake us believers in Divine Providence out of our sense of complacency.

By analogy, the death of Rabbi Pincus, his wife and his daughter, their "expulsion" from this life, was also to shake us believers in Divine Providence out of our sense of complacency. Surely, we are not doing enough spiritually to justify our continued existence. The holy tension that is so crucial to the maintenance of the proper

relationship with God must be lacking in the House of Israel.

But how can it be beneficial to remove the very people who instill the fire of holiness into the soul of the Jewish people if this is indeed what is lacking?

The answer: the House of Israel is one inseparable body. When the atmosphere of striving towards spiritual heights is replaced by a general feeling of complacency, no one can function properly. Someone has to volunteer to re-establish the sanctity of the Tabernacle. Who could be more suitable to die for Israel than Rabbi Pincus who lived only for it?

The Sins at the Beginning

During the dedication of the *Mishkan*, the Jewish people were required to bring many *korbanos*, sacrifices, (Vayikra 9:3-4) a goat for a sin offering, a calf and lamb for a burnt offering and a bull and a ram for peace offerings.

Why so many? The *Toras Kohanim* explains that the Jewish people had an account with Hashem, with "sins at the beginning and sins at the end." The "sins at the beginning" refer to the sale of Yosef, when the brothers dipped his coat in goat's blood. The goat comes as atonement for that sin. The "sins at the end" refer to the Golden Calf, for which the calf is brought as atonement.

We can readily understand why the Jewish people had to make amends for the sin of the Golden Calf during the dedication ceremony of the *Mishkan*. The erection of the Golden Calf as an intermediary to Hashem was tantamount to *avodah zarah*, a direct affront to Him. Therefore, when the *Mishkan* was being dedicated and the *Shechinah* was about to dwell within it, amends were very much in order.

But what was the connection between the sale of Yosef and the dedication of the *Mishkan*? It was not a recent occurrence. Why then should it be brought up again in this context?

The *Yalkut Yehudah* points out that an underlying element of jealousy led to the sale of Yosef. The brothers could not bear that Yaakov singled Yosef out for a special role, that he gave him special treatment, that he provided him with special garments. If Yosef was so special, that meant they were less special. Unable to bear the thought, they plotted against him and eventually sold him into slavery.

What was happening when the *Mishkan* was being built? One family was being singled out to be the priestly caste, to perform the sacred service, to wear special priestly garb, to be given the priestly gifts, to be treated as special in every way. The *Kohanim* were an easy target for jealousy, as indeed came to pass during Korach's rebellion, when they declared (*Bamidbar* 16:3), "The entire congregation is holy and God is

among them; why should you lord it over the assembly of God?"

The dedication of the *Mishkan* was, therefore, a time to remember that in Judaism there are roles. There are roles for *Kohanim*; there are roles for Levites; there are roles for men; there are roles for women. Not everyone is alike. Not everyone has the same strengths. Not everyone is going to have the same duties and responsibilities. Not everyone is going to get the same benefits and privileges. Everyone must be content with the role Hashem has assigned to him.

This then was an exceedingly appropriate time to bring sacrifices to atone for the sin of selling Yosef. This would impress upon the people the extreme danger of giving in to jealousy. It had led to disaster in the past, and it could lead to disaster in the future, unless it was nipped in the bud.

Special Qualifications

After Moshe gave Aharon all the detailed instructions regarding his duties in the dedication of the *Mishkan*, he said to him, "Draw near to the Altar." What happened? Why did he need special encouragement? Why did Moshe have to coax him forward?

The *Toras Kohanim* explains that Aharon suddenly saw the Altar in the shape of an ox, and he shrunk back. As the Ramban explains, the shape of the ox reminded Aharon of the sin of the Golden Calf, in which he had played an unwilling role.

In his great righteousness, Aharon did not consider himself worthy of approaching the Altar. "How can I come near to the Altar?" he said. "I, too, participated in the Sin of the Golden Calf."

"My brother, you're afraid of that?" Moshe told him. "You of all people don't have to fear what the ox represents."

That is why, the *Toras Kohanim* concludes, Moshe said to Aharon, "Draw near to the Altar."

The *Toras Kohanim* leaves us somewhat in the dark. Why indeed did Aharon have nothing to fear from the image of the ox? What was wrong with his reasoning? Even if he was not fully guilty, it was certainly a matter of concern. What did Moshe mean when he told him that "you of all people don't have to fear" the memory of the Golden Calf?

The *Yalkut Yehudah* offers an explanation based on the Midrash. Why indeed did Aharon participate in the construction of the Golden Calf? Even after he saw Chur murdered, why didn't he put his foot down and take a stand? Why didn't he say, "I will not allow this. Over my dead body will you make an idol"?

According to the Midrash, Aharon had the best interests of the Jewish people in mind. "If I let them build the Calf," Aharon reasoned, "the sin will be forever on their heads. Better that I should build it. Better that I should be blamed than the Jewish people. Better that I should bear the sin."

Hashem told Aharon, "Your love for the Jewish people was such that you were willing to sacrifice your righteousness to save them. Therefore, you will be anointed High Priest."

Because of his self-sacrifice, because he was willing to give up his *Olam Haba* for the Jewish people, because he placed the welfare of the people above his own, precisely for these reasons was he deemed worthy of being the *Kohein Gadol*.

"My brother, you are afraid of that?" Moshe told Aharon. "That's precisely why you were chosen. Draw near to the Altar!"

Perfect Faith

And Aharon was silent. (10:3)

Aharon's two older sons, Nadav and Avihu, were men of extraordinary stature, righteous leaders who were worthy of someday stepping in the shoes of Moshe and Aharon. And then, during the joyous dedication of the *Mishkan*, they made a small error, and a fire reached out from the Holy of Holies and snuffed out their lives.

We cannot even begin to imagine the shock to Aharon, a father who witnessed his two glorious sons perish right before his eyes. What went through his mind in that split second? His own loss, the loss suffered by the entire Jewish people, the loss suffered by the two deceased sons themselves. So much loss. Such a gaping void.

What was Aharon's reaction? The Torah tells us that "Aharon was silent." Silence. Complete acceptance. Unshakable faith. One of the most eloquent and powerful exhibitions of faith recorded in the Torah.

The Torah forbids excessive mourning over a deceased relative (*Devarim* 14:1). "Do not mutilate yourselves, and do not tear out your hair between your eyes over the dead." The Ramban writes that self-destructive mourning shows a lack of faith in Hashem. If we believe in the immortality of the soul and that all Hashem does is ultimately for the good, we do not mourn too much, even in the face of tragic youthful death.

A few years ago, the Baltimore community suffered a tragic loss on Erev Pesach. Mr. and Mrs. Israel Weinstein's son and his wife were killed in an automobile accident while coming from Lakewood to Baltimore for Pesach.

I was not there to witness it personally, but I heard from others that Mr. Weinstein's faith and acceptance were incredible. It is hard to conceive how a man who has just been told that his two beloved children had been torn away from him can walk into the Pesach *Seder* and make the *Shehechianu* blessing, thanking Hashem for sustaining life and bringing us to this joyous occasion. It is hard to conceive how such a man can walk into *shul* the next day and say "*Gut Yom Tov*" to everyone without a trace of his grief on his face so as not to disturb the festival spirit. It is hard to conceive how such a man, sitting in *shul*, can reach out and affectionately pat the cheek of a little child that happens to walk by. It could only be accomplished by a man whose heart is full of a rare and unshakable faith.

During the *Shivah*, the father of the boy whose cheek Mr. Weinstein had patted asked him, "How, in the moment of your most profound grief, could you still bend down to a child and pat him on the cheek?"

“At that exact moment,” Mr. Weinstein responded, “when your little boy walked past me, with everything I was feeling in my heart, I realized how special each and every one of our children is. Sometimes we take our children for granted. Times like these clear our vision.”

A person can only have such strength if he has a clear vision of the eternal light that shines at the end of every dark tunnel, if he has a strong and abiding faith in the Master of the Universe. Such a person, like Aharon before him, can be silent.