

פרשת שמיני

ויאמר משה אל אהרן, הוא אשר דבר ה' לאמר, בקרבי אקדש, ועל פני כל העם אכבד... (פרק י' ג)
And Moshe said to Aharon: Of this did Hashem speak, saying: "I will be sanctified through those who are nearest Me, thus I will be honored before the entire people"...

Aharon had just lost his two eldest sons. A horrific tragedy. As Rashi tells us, Moshe Rabbeinu attempts to comfort his brother by explaining to him that when Hashem imposes strict justice upon His righteous, He is feared and honored, for all will say, "If such is the fate of the most honorable, surely the punishment for those who intentionally defy Him will be much worse." And as Moshe continues: "Aharon, my brother. I knew that the Mishkan would become sanctified through those intimate with HKBH. I was under the impression that it would be either through me or you. Now I see that they are greater than I or you."

Rav Hirsch elaborates*: "אקדש, through My strong actions against My close ones, My sanctity becomes known. For by not overlooking the sins of My close ones-and even decreeing upon them death-it becomes manifest that My will is absolute. For even the greatest persons, those closest to me-and precisely they-are not allowed the slightest deviation from My will. ועל פני כל העם אכבד, as a result, the people will recognize the true weightiness of the obedience they owe Me." Moshe's words connect אהרן-וידם/and Aharon was silent. Once again Rav Hirsch expands on this: "Had his sons not been ה' קרובי, perhaps their sin would have been forgiven, and the Divine decree that was dealt them would not have been a warning of such solemn import to the people. These words of Hashem are antithetical to the modern point of view that grants immunity to the great men of intellect in the matter of their moral lapses. According to this view, men of intellect are entitled to be treated with great leniency if they should violate G-d's moral law. According to Judaism, the greater the person, the greater is his moral responsibility."

The Meshech Chochma approaches this heartbreaking event in his own unique way. He begins with an intriguing Medrash Rabba on ויקהל מח' א: "Koheles tells us, 'טוב שמן טוב.../A good name is better than good oil...' i.e. the names of חנניה ומשאל ועזריה were 'better' than the oil used to anoint נדב ואביהוא." The simple understanding of this Medrash is that משאל ועזריה sanctified Hashem and merited to survive the fire of an oven. נדב ואביהוא were sanctified by the שמן המשחה but could not escape the fire of Heaven. The takeaway message is that קדושה bestowed on a person does not necessarily afford protection. It has to be earned. By utilizing the abovementioned Rashi, Rav Meir Simcha offers his own explanation: The Medrash is comparing two groups of people who each were שמן שמים but in extremely different ways and with dramatically different outcomes. King Nebuchadnezzar threw משאל ועזריה into a flaming furnace and they emerged unscathed. Upon seeing this wondrous act of G-d, the wicked Nebuchadnezzar, in דניאל פרק ג-ד' exclaims, "Blessed is the G-d of חנניה ומשאל ועזריה who sent His angel and saved His servants... (who) offered their bodies in order not to worship...any other god other than their own... All the

inhabitants of the earth are reckoned as nothing..." The גמרא סנהדרין צב: explains that Nebuchadnezzar, the ultimate עובד עבודה זרה, was so moved by this miracle that he arranged and offered praises more beautiful and more pleasing to Hashem than King David's psalms! The גמרא continues and tells us that all the nations of the world approached עם ישראל and proclaimed the greatness of Hashem! All this positive reaction, all this stirring of religiosity and subjugation was in response to a קידוש ה' performed by these three men, which portrayed HKBH as an all-powerful and loving protector of His faithful followers. Contrast this with נדב ואביהוא. Their קידוש ה' produced a fear of Hashem. HKBH-בקרבי אקדש is an exacting G-d Who will do justice especially with his most righteous. A very different lesson about which the Medrash says, טוב שם משמן טוב. How could two such virtuous groups be מקדש שם שמים with such drastically disparate results? Rav Meir Simcha posits that the difference lies in the intent. He points to Tosfos in פסחים נג: who tells us that in fact חנניה משאל ועזריה had the opportunity to flee from Nebuchadnezzar and his decree. They stayed and remained with their people. This total selflessness merited to them surviving the king's furnace, being re-united with their people and the subsequent outpouring of love to Hashem. Doing something for the צבור with no "me" in it, is the only way to accomplish this. נדב ואביהוא on the other hand, were yearning to attain intense closeness with Hashem. Very noble but also very personal and potentially divisive. The resultant קידוש ה' was of a different caliber. It produced יראת ה' as opposed to the more expansive אהבת ה'.

We all strive to "do the right thing" and be a source of קידוש ה'. The Meshech Chochma from this Parsha shows us that even our attempts at sanctifying Hashem's name must be well thought out. For if there is any possibility of it creating a schism, then, as in the case of נדב ואביהוא, it would be better left undone.

*With permission of the Editors

לזכר נשמת אבי מורי ישראל מנחם בן שלום ז"ל
ולזכר נשמת הרב יהודה בן אברהם שמחה (קופרמן) זצ"ל מחבר הגהות על
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