

# SICHA SUMMARY

## Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 27

### *Acharei, Sicha 1*

#### The Context:

On the eighth day of the Mishkan's inauguration, Nadav and Avihu, two of Aharon's sons, entered the Holy of Holies inappropriately and died. In the aftermath of the tragedy, G-d clarified what the cause had been, and how to prevent a recurrence in the future, "Do not drink wine that will lead to intoxication, neither you nor your sons with you, when you go into the Tent of Meeting, so that you shall not die. (Vayikra 10:9) As Rashi comments: "They died because they had entered the sanctuary after having drunk wine."

Over the next two and a half portions, the Torah details the laws concerning sacrifices, the laws distinguishing kosher from unkosher animals, the laws of impurity contracted from animals, and the laws of human impurity.

Then, in the opening of parshas Acharei, which discusses the sacrificial rites of the Yom Kippur service, the Torah again references the death of Aharon's sons and

adds another cautionary law: "Aharon should not come at all times into the Holy within the dividing curtain, in front of the cover that is upon the ark, so that he should not die," as Rashi again notes, "so that he should not die the way his sons died." Rather, he should only enter the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur as the Torah goes on to specify.

#### The Question:

Why does the Torah wait so long after the narrative of Nadav and Avihu's death to add the second exhortation against entering the Holy of Holies outside of Yom Kippur? Why not offer both instructions in the same narrative?

#### The Explanation:

Many commentaries suggest that Nadav and Avihu were spiritually sensitive people who, when exposed to the tangible holiness of the Mishkan, were overwhelmed with a desire for attachment with G-d until their souls expired. In the words of the verse itself, "when they drew near before G-d, and [therefore] they died."

In chassidic terminology, they experienced a ratzo, a yearning to flee embodied constraints and be absorbed in G-d's unity,

and did not temper it with the required shuv, a return to the world and the mandate to transform it into a home for G-d.

There are two possible motivations for this intense desire: 1) the person feels the alluring sweetness of G-d's oneness; 2) the person feels the encumbered and oppressed by the incessant demands of this world, of the rampant negativity and ego, and so desires to uproot himself from it.

The first is the response of a person whose main occupation is in the confines of Torah study and spiritual leadership. They are more prone to be attracted to the beauty of G-d's unity. The second is the response of a person whose main occupation is in the material world of commerce. They are more prone to be discouraged by the brutish nature of this worldly experience and seek to flee from it.

The two exhortations in the aftermath of Nadav and Avihu's death are addressed to each of these two prototypes.

To the spiritual seeker ensconced in the world of Torah and prayer, the Torah says, "'Do not drink wine that will lead to intoxication.'" Wine is a metaphor for

mystical exploration; the Torah is warning this individual to not allow himself to be carried away with mystical seeking, to ensure that they remain grounded in this world so they can fulfill their task of refining the physical universe.

The embattled businessman feels that the world is too stubborn to be transformed, and therefore he seeks relief in the spiritual. Therefore, the Torah interrupts the narrative with two portions of Torah guidance on how the human being can sanctify the material realm through sacrifices; how they can sanctify their material food, by differentiating between what is holy and unholy, and how a person can discern between purity and impurity in their own life. In other words, the Torah addresses the person of the world to say that transformation of the material is possible. And so, "do not come at all times into the Holy within the dividing curtain," there is no need to divorce yourself from the material reality. And if the engagement with this world does lead to failure, the Torah continues, there is always Yom Kippur, the possibility of repentance and renewal.

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