

Lessons and Insights From The Deaths of Nadav and Avihu

פרשת פנחס

The Torah repeats the death of Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu, due to their bringing a strange fire in front of Hashem a total of four times. One of these four times is listed in this week's Parsha (26:61), as it says, "וימת נדב ואביהוא בהקריבם אש-זרה לפני ה'" The Medrash addresses the repetition of this episode in a few places, each time offering us a different insight.

The Medrash asks, "Why are the deaths of Nadav and Avihu written in so many places?" Then it answers, "This teaches us that Hashem was in pain over them, because the children of Aharon were beloved by Hashem." Hashem wanted us to know that He is pained by their deaths, and it is constantly on His mind.

From this Medrash we find an important insight into how Hashem wants us to relate to Him. We tend to view Hashem's execution of justice to be devoid of emotion. This viewpoint makes it difficult to relate to Hashem. From here we see that despite the fact that Nadav and Avihu did something wrong, and their deaths caused Hashem's name to be sanctified, He was still pained by their deaths. The knowledge of His pain was so important to impart to us, that Hashem repeated this episode four times, so we can relate to Him in a human context.

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In another Medrash regarding this episode, it states, "Rebbi Yirmiyah Ben Elazar says, in four places it mentions the deaths of Aharon's sons, and in all of them it mentions their sin. Why does the Torah do this? This is to inform you that this was their only sin." We can ask on this Medrash, if Hashem wanted to communicate to us that this was their only sin, why didn't He write this straight out? Why did He want us to derive it through an inference?

We see from here that the most effective way to communicate an idea is through self-discovery. Often when we clearly spell out an idea, the listener is inattentive and does not fully think it through.

However through self-discovery, the message can penetrate more deeply. The Vilna Gaon expresses a similar idea in the Avnei Eliyahu, his commentary on the siddur. He says that when one is explaining an idea one should be brief and concise, as this is the best way to get someone to think and grasp an idea.

The Medrash continues and states, "Rebbi Elazar Hamodae says, 'come and see how precious the children of Aharon were to Hashem. In every place it mentions their deaths their sin is mentioned. Why did the Torah do this? This is in order that the world should never think that Nadav and Avihu died due to other sins and the Torah concealed it.

From this Medrash we can derive an insight that can positively impact us in regards to Bein Adam Lachaveiro. When thinking about our obligation of ואהבת לרעך כמוך, we usually view it as an obligation that includes: not hurting someone, defending someone from harm, and treating someone with the same respect and dignity I would want to be treated. It seems from here that love includes being so protective over someone's reputation that no one will ever think negatively about them.