

Acharei Mot - Kedoshim

Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of the two sons of Aharon who died when they drew too close to the presence of Hashem. Hashem said to Moshe: "Tell your brother Aharon that he is not to come at will into the Holy [of Holies] behind the curtain, in front of the cover that is upon the ark, lest he die; for I appear in the cloud over the cover."

This week's parsha begins by invoking the recent death of Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu. Nadav and Avihu died in an attempt to offer unauthorized incense in the Holy of Holies. The Torah proceeds to explain that Aharon, the High Priest, is not to repeat the mistake of his sons. He is given careful instructions to only enter the Holy of Holies on the most sacred day of the year, Yom Kippur.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, 1902-1994) quotes the Ohr haChayim, who explains that Nadav and Avihu's error was something quite subtle. Their intent had been to draw closer to Hashem. They thought that offering incense in the Holy of Holies--perhaps the highest form of Divine service--was the correct way to do this. Why, in fact, were they wrong?

The Rebbe explains that their death was not a punishment, so much as a consequence of their act. Attempting to transcend reality--to serve Hashem only from the closest vantage point--is not consonant with life. We are here in this world to be limited, to serve

Continued...



JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Hashem from a distance and struggle toward Him. This is why we have been put here-- as the Sages tell us, “al karchach atah chai”--we are in this world against our true will! We are obligated to live in reality and not attempt to escape it.

Aharon is cautioned not to fall into this trap. The only time that we are permitted to transcend our limitations and failings and relate to Hashem at the highest level is Yom Kippur. On this day, the High Priest is allowed to enter the Holy of Holies and offer incense. We fast, dressed in white like angels, and for a brief moment we rise above it all. The rest of the year is devoted to a harder task--consecrating Hashem's Name in the real world we live in.

A man with outward courage dares to die; a man with inner courage dares to live.

Lao Tzu

Shabbat Shalom
Rabbi Asher Coleman

