

The Spice of Life

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March 20, 2014



“It’s all your fault!”

Since the days of Adam and Eve, men have always found a convenient “explanation” for their problems: blame the spouse. The problem for Nadav and Avihu, Aaron’s two unwedded sons who brought an unauthorized incense-offering (*ketoret*) and were punished with death, was that they didn’t have one to blame. The Midrash explains that the reason they were killed was because they had no wives (*Vayikra Rabbah* 20:8-10).

Now, anyone who knows anything about these two also knows they were no ordinary folks. Nadav and Avihu, raised in the home of Aaron the High Priest, were tremendous Tzaddikim, men of an epic spiritual level. According to the *Zohar*, the spiritual

effect created by the burning of the *ketoret* is infinitely great. Nadav and Avihu sincerely wanted to generate this cosmic effect. But they overlooked one key and seemingly odd ingredient in the incense mixture: *chelbonah* (galbanum.) *Chelbonah* is different from the other ten ingredients in the *ketoret* because it smells really bad. Nevertheless, the incense-offering is incomplete without it, and one who fails to include it is liable to the death penalty. Yet doesn't this seem odd? Shouldn't something as spiritual potent and powerful as the *ketoret* only contain spices whose fragrance is "divine"?

Rebbe Nachman teaches us to view holiness differently. A higher spiritual level necessitates greater responsibility and the potential to elevate things that are on a lower level. The inclusion of the *chelbonah* teaches us that since the other ingredients smell so sweet, they have the ability to "spice up" the foulness of this ingredient. Nadav and Avihu erred by not realizing they were given such a high spiritual level in order to reveal God's goodness to those whose odor might just be a little off.

They also erred by choosing not to marry in order to protect their spiritual status. As they say, life isn't always a bed of roses. Daily life has its challenges and stresses. Perhaps Nadav and Avihu were concerned that they might come home after a long day at work in the Mishkan only to find their wives worn out from taking care of the children and keeping the tent in shape. They might have had to listen and lend support to the emotional demands of their spouses and their complaints about seemingly mundane matters. But this is what God demands of us. We must use our spiritual growth to elevate the most mundane aspects of our lives. Bringing joy to a sad or stressed-out spouse or friend is the greatest of *mitzvot*. Encouraging and bringing closer a Jew who has fallen away is comparable to the powerful effect of the *ketoret*.

It's only when we start to live with this lifestyle that we

can begin to reach truly lofty levels. This is the purpose of Creation and God's ultimate desire. God has bestowed us with spiritual treasures so that we will share them with others who are not as privileged.

Could there be a "higher" Jew than the High Priest in the Holy Temple on Yom Kippur? The Torah states, "And he shall effect atonement ... upon all the people of the congregation" (Leviticus 16:33). It is specifically at that time, when he is allowed the once-a-year privilege of entering into the holiest place on earth, that the High Priest brings about atonement for all Jews and restores their relationship with their Father in Heaven. And, let's not forget, he also needs to be married! (Leviticus 16:11; *Yoma* 2a).

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Even HaEzer Hilkhos Piryah VeRivyah

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A Gutn Shabbos! Shabbat Shalom!