

# We give up before we even get started

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“Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel ascended. They saw the God of Israel...He did not send forth His hand – they [Nadab and Abihu] viewed God, yet they ate and drank” (Exodus 24:9-11).

This implies they were fit to be punished because they looked at Him with a haughty heart while eating and drinking (Rashi, ad loc.).

Food has a special power to satiate the heart. In spiritual terms, this means that it strengthens and warms our hearts. This can make us yearn and even burst for spirituality and closeness to God, beyond the boundaries that are fit and proper for us.

Nadab and Abihu ate and drank, fueling their desire for spirituality and leading them to “gaze” at God at a level not suitable for them. According to the Midrash, they repeated this mistake when they brought a “foreign fire” into the Sanctuary after drinking wine. They actually forgot about God and became wrapped up in their own spiritual fantasy.

Most of us struggle with a similar desire for spirituality, but we take it in the opposite direction. In our case, we

think that we can never reach the heights of spirituality that we want to attain, and so we give up before we even get started. “What’s the point? I’ll never be a tzaddik,” we tell ourselves.

This kind of thinking stems from the belief that we have done so many wrongs that we cannot change anything by doing something good again. We think that “small” acts like learning a page of Torah or giving money to charity won’t earn us full *teshuvah* (repentance) and make us better people. To do *teshuvah*, we contend, we must completely remake ourselves, reversing all our bad character traits, studying and praying all day, and doing everything perfect. Overwhelmed by the abundance of spirituality we think we need to grasp, we end up not doing anything at all.

The truth of the matter is that a little bit is also good. Even if we merit doing a tiny act for God’s sake, this will be preserved for us forever and can never be taken away. Even if we give but a penny to charity, the merit we gain is eternal. And if we accustom ourselves to thinking and living in this manner, adding spirituality in measured doses, slowly but surely, we *will* become tzaddikim.

*(Based on Likutey Halakhot, Hilkhhot Terumot U’Ma’aserot 3)*