

THE TRIBE WEEKLY

PARASHAT SHEMINI

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Selfish Service



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A standout moment from Parashat Shemini is the death of Nadav and Avihu, two of Aharon's sons. The Torah explains that they brought an incense offering with a "strange fire", which they had not been commanded to bring. A flame of God emerges, consumes them and they die.

What was it that they did wrong? They just offered a *korban* (offering) out of longing to serve God. So why did they die?

There are multiple explanations brought by Torah commentators.

One idea is that they entered the Holy of Holies, where even the High Priest may only enter on Yom Kippur.

Rashi (1040-1105) references Rabbi

Eliezer in the *Midrash Sifra*, who says that they died because they made the offering without consulting Moshe (Moses), their teacher. On the other hand, Rabbi Yishmael claimed they died because they were intoxicated with wine whilst inside the *Mishkan*.

An approach that resonates with me, brought in a book of Nechama Liebowitz's thoughts on the parasha, is that men of high stature such as Nadav and Avihu should have been more modest, as it says in Micah 6:8, "walk modestly with your God". They should have dreaded entering the *Mishkan* unless summoned and avoided bringing a fire offering on their own initiative.

Although these prominent leaders might not have explicitly broken the law, but merely exceeded the limits set by discipline and modesty, this was a major sin, given their rank and their need to act as role models, so they perished.

Evidently, Nadav and Avihu sinned by reaching for God through the desires of their own hearts rather than through the path set by God. Submission to the 'yoke of Heaven' - the ultimate aim of the Torah - was here replaced by uncontrolled religious passion, hence their punishment. This means that Nadav and Avihu were serving themselves, as they were chasing the pleasure of serving God and offering the sacrifice, not out of love for Him, but out of the desire for personal benefit.

There are rules for offerings in the *Mishkan*. Precise limits are prescribed, even for the free-will offerings, which must be strictly adhered to. The closeness to God which we seek with every offering may only be found through acceptance of God's will.

May we all merit to have the humility and dedication to keep God's mitzvot with accuracy and pure, selfless intention.

Parasha Wordsearch

Words can go in any direction and can share letters as they cross over each other.

AHARON
NADAV
AVIHU
FIRE
OFFERING
WINE
SHEMINI
CUD
HOOVES
GRASSHOPPER
INSECTS
KOSHER
FINS
SCALES

S	W	A	D	C	M	T	V	U	W	G	V
R	E	U	H	I	V	A	I	J	T	R	V
E	C	V	H	A	M	K	T	N	J	A	E
H	H	Q	O	E	R	I	F	M	D	S	M
S	Y	R	J	O	S	O	G	A	X	S	M
O	T	G	O	H	H	N	N	F	N	H	N
K	S	C	A	L	E	S	I	A	F	O	D
A	D	Y	E	M	M	F	R	F	G	P	E
S	D	J	G	S	I	C	E	N	V	P	V
L	A	H	K	M	N	N	F	J	V	E	I
W	G	T	R	R	I	I	F	Z	R	R	Y
X	I	D	A	W	F	Y	O	S	O	O	P
X	I	D	A	W	F	Y	O	S	O	O	P