YESHIVA YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

**STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA**

**PARASHAT ACHAREI MOT**

**SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL**

**"After the Death of Aharon's Two Sons"**

Summarized by Matan Gildai

Translated by David Silverberg

"God spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons, who died when they drew too close to the presence of God." Rashi explains this introduction by drawing a parallel to a patient whose doctor came to treat him and warned him not to eat anything cold or sleep on anything moist. A second doctor advised him, "Do not eat anything cold or sleep on anything moist so that you don't die the way so-and-so did." The admonition of the second physician is clearly more effective. Similarly, God introduces His warning to Aharon that he shall not "enter at any moment into the sanctuary" by reminding him of his sons' untimely death.

Chazal (Vayikra Rabba 20:6) raise several possible explanations regarding the nature of the sin committed by Aharon's sons:

a) they ruled on matters of Halakha while in the presence of Moshe, their master;

b) they entered the Mikdash while intoxicated;

c) they entered while not wearing the required priestly garb;

d) they failed to wash their hands and feet prior to entering;

e) they weren't married;

f) they inappropriately anticipated the death of Moshe and Aharon so that they might succeed them as leaders.

There are several other interpretations as well. But according to all these possibilities, there was no reason to suspect Aharon of these misdeeds. Why, then, did God feel the need to warn Aharon not to sin and consequently die, just as his sons had?

It seems that this question forces us to look more closely at the overall problem regarding Nadav and Avihu. They were young, full of energy and enthusiasm, and eagerly interested in changing the status quo and replacing the current leadership, as we saw in the Midrash. The Gemara (Eruvin 63a) says that Aharon's sons' based their decision to offer "a strange fire" on the reasoning that, "Although fire came down from Heaven [and consumed the inaugural sacrifices on the altar], there is a mitzva to bring [fire] from humans." They felt uneasy about the fact that everything came directly from the Almighty, and wished to take a more active role in the offering of korbanot to God. They longed for a relationship with the Almighty and therefore hurried into the sanctuary to light the "human" fire before the Heavenly fire descended. Perhaps if they had been married, their energy would have been focused upon their families and homes; since they were single, they turned all their enthusiasm towards God.

Their involvement in the exalted activities of the Mishkan and korbanot, their attention to man's intimacy with God, led them to disregard the "smaller" mitzvot, which are often dwarfed by the sublime areas of korbanot and entry into the Mikdash. They overlooked the obligations involving dress and preparation - the washing of one's hands and feet - and even the prohibition of entering after drinking. At times, a person will involve himself so intensely in sublime and lofty pursuits that he forgets the smaller details.

Herein, perhaps, lies the central message of the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, and this is why Aharon needed a reminder. Even when he merits entry into the Kodesh Ha-kodashim and experiences elevation and communion with the Almighty, at a level surpassing that experienced by any other individual, he must still remember the smaller details. One may not enter the Almighty's domain, as it were, whenever he wants, and, when one does enter, he must first fulfill the specific conditions and avoid contact with ritual impurity. No matter how sublime one's religious experience, no one is above the requirements of the Halakha, and especially those in close contact with God must always bear this in mind. In one's haste to approach God, he must not trample seemingly "petty" minutiae of Halakha underfoot.

(Originally delivered on leil Shabbat, Parashat Acharei Mot/Kedoshim 5754 [1994].)