

Good Shabbos Everyone. In this week's parsha we read about the tragic deaths of Nadav and Avihu, Aaron's sons. One of the reasons given for Nadav and Avihu's deaths at the hands of Hashem, was that they went in the Mishkan (Holy Tabernacle) and performed unauthorized sacrifices while being drunk. Performing the service of Hashem while drunk was seen as a horrible profanation of Hashem's name. Thus, the two were taken from this world. From here we see the Jewish outlook on drinking excessively.

Let us now explore briefly the issue of Judaism's view on this issue of excessive drinking, by bringing sources from the Talmud, and retelling a story from Me'am Loez. With limited exceptions, (Purim for example, according to some opinions, and the 4 cups of wine at the Pesach seder) Judaism frowns on drinking to the point of inebriation.

The Talmud tells us that excessive drinking has caused problems from the very beginning of time. The Tree, from which Adam ate was a grapevine, for there is nothing that brings calamity on a person more than wine. (Sanhedrin 70a-b) Noach and Lot, also got into a lot of trouble through drunkenness. Rava said that the result of alcohol consumption is bloodshed and Rav Kahana added that improper consumption [of wine] impoverishes. Rava adds that it [drinking] destroys a person (Sanhedrin 70a).

If a person becomes drunk, he is no longer in his right mind. Even such great people as Nadav and Avihu, who were in many ways as great as Moshe and Aaron, had these terrible things happen to them merely because they were drunk. When a person is drunk, he does not have the clarity of mind to serve Hashem. He wakes up late and does not say his prayers or recite the Sh'ma at the proper time. The Talmud teaches us for example, that a drunk person should not pray; and if he does pray, his prayer is an abomination. (Sanhedrin 64a) A drinker can also become involved in so many other sins that they cannot be counted.

A person who becomes drunk also loses all his status in the eyes of his fellow man. They laugh at him as they would at a monkey, which causes anguish to his relatives. The Midrash tells about a certain Tzadik (righteous person) whose father was a drunkard.

Every day the man would go to the bar and get so drunk that he would fall in the street. Children would come and make fun of him, teasing and bothering him to no end. They would yell after him, "See, there goes the drunk."

When the Tzadik saw his father being humiliated, his heart cringed inside and he wanted to die. He said to his father, "Don't go to the bars. Have some respect. Sit at home. I'll bring you all the wine you want until it is coming out of your mouth. You can live in peace at home. This is causing tremendous humiliation, both to me and to you." (ed. admittedly, this is not the current conventional wisdom regarding helping relatives who have drinking problems.)

The son would urge his father every day, until the father agreed not to go to the tavern. Each day the son would go to the trouble of bringing him all the food and drink he wanted. Then the son would lay him down in bed to sleep.

One day the Tzadik went out in the street and saw a drunk lying in the middle of an open sewer. The water was all over him and children were busy at their childish pranks of teasing the drunk.

The Tzadik said to himself, "Now is the time to bring my father to see this drunk. Let him see with his own eyes how denigrated one is when he becomes drunk. Maybe this will change him, and he will not waste all his days at the taverns."

The Tzadik went and brought his father to the drunk in the street. They passed by the drunk lying in the open sewer, and they saw all that the children were doing to him.

When the old man saw the drunk, he went up to him and asked him, "In what tavern did you get such good wine? I would also like to get some."

His son said to him, "Father, I brought you here so you should see a drunk and learn a lesson! I wanted you to see with your own eyes his great humiliation, and to avoid taverns."

His father then said, "My son, by my life, in all the world I have no greater joy than to be in such a situation."

This story tells the evils that can come from alcoholism. Besides the fact that drunkenness can lead a person to all sorts of sins, it can even bring one to shed the blood of his relatives. Family members are miserable when they see one so close to them suffering and in such a humiliating position. One is certain to be judged for this in the next world, and he will be severely punished for excessive drinking.

Therefore, anyone who has pity on his soul will not drink too much and will not become so drunk that he is no longer aware of what he is doing.

The opinion that Nadav's and Avihu's sin was drunkenness has support in the narrative itself. After the Torah tells us that Nadav and Avihu died, it states that Hashem told Aaron and his surviving sons, "Do not drink wine or intoxicants, you and your sons with you, when you come to the Communion Tent, and you will not die. This shall be an everlasting decree for your generations" (10:8). This teaches that they were not to drink wine when they came to perform the Divine service, and that they were not even to enter the Tabernacle if they were drunk. This is evidence that the sin of Nadav and Avihu was that they had gone in to perform the service while drunk." And their punishment is well known.

The Sages tell us that the challenge of Jew in this life to sanctify himself through those things which are permissible to him. (Yevomos 20a) Meaning, that a Jew must control his desires for physical pleasures and he should use physical pleasures as a vehicle to serve Hashem. This does not mean that a Jew should deny himself physical pleasures; rather, it means that a Jew should use physicality, such as eating and drinking, to serve Hashem. For example, it is ok to have a lavish meal with good wine, but have that meal on Shabbos or Yom Tov in honor of those special days, and even then, don't eat and drink excessively! By working on ourselves and helping others overcome their eating and drinking addictions, we can all sanctify ourselves to be able to serve Hashem properly. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**