

# הַדָּרֵךְ THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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## THE SIN OF NADAV AND AVIHU AND THEIR INFINITE GREATNESS

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

**T**he Sages have spoken in several places concerning the nature of Nadav and Avihu's sin, which the Torah describes by stating, "The sons of Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, each took his fire pan ... and they brought before the L-RD an alien fire that He had not commanded them" (Leviticus 10:1). Among other things, the Sages have said that they walked behind Moses and Aaron and said, "When will these old men die so that you and I will lead the generation?" (Sanhedrin 52a). Furthermore, they were not married (Zohar III:39a) and they entered the Sanctuary in a state of drunkenness, which was the cause of their punishment.

All this is very surprising. How could Nadav and Avihu manage to feel greater than Moses and Aaron, to the point that they came to teach a Halachah before their teachers (Eruvin 63a)? Did they not understand that they deserved to be punished for this, just as if they had not performed the Eternal's mitzvot?

This can be entirely explained. Nadav and Avihu thought that Moses had attained his greatness because he had climbed to the heavens with G-d's permission, and it was there that he reached the fullness of his holiness. His brother Aaron had followed the same process in going up with Moses, as it is written, "Then you shall ascend, and Aaron with you" (Exodus 19:24). But they, Nadav and Avihu, had reached the level that they were at through their own efforts, without climbing to heaven and without any external help. Consequently, they felt greater than Moses and Aaron, and this is what made them believe that they were worthy of leading the Children of Israel. However, they were punished for what they did, for they should have known that Heaven doesn't bestow greatness to someone without reason, and that they were absolutely forbidden to question how Moses and Aaron governed the people. This blindness brought death upon them.

In reality, Moses and Aaron were greater than Nadav and Avihu. Actually, Moses never favorably compared himself with anyone, for he regarded everyone well. For example, when his son Gershom ran towards him to say, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp" (Numbers 11:27) and his servant Joshua added, "My lord Moses, incarcerate them!" (v.28), Moses responded, "Are you being zealous for my sake? Would that the entire people of the L-RD could be prophets, if the L-RD would but place His spirit upon them!" (v.29). Neither did his brother Aaron believe himself to be at an exceptional level. He considered himself as the least among the Children of Israel, to the point of stating, "What are we...?" (Exodus 17:7). They didn't attribute any importance to themselves, which is why G-d didn't accept Nadav and Avihu's claim. He preferred to name as a leader someone that had no pretensions and was humble and modest with the people. From this we should learn the proper way to conduct ourselves, as well as the appropriate manner in which to lead the Children of Israel: We should not favorably compare ourselves

to anybody, and we should not to look down on anyone. On the contrary, a leader should constantly be under the impression that he is dragging along impure insects with him, as our Sages have said, "A person is not named as a leader until he moves a box filled with impure insects" (Yoma 22b). In other words, he has something for which to be criticized, and this will prevent him from becoming boastful. As for the people, they have nothing for which to be blamed, permitting their leader to judge them with complete fairness.

Now Nadav and Avihu felt superior to Moses and Aaron, whereas the opposite was not true. Quite to the contrary, Moses and Aaron felt great respect for them, as for example when they applied G-d's words to Nadav and Avihu: "I will be sanctified through those who are nearest Me" (Leviticus 10:3). And it is precisely by this that Moses is considered as being great.

For the moment, let us consider what G-d commanded: "The entire House of Israel shall bewail the conflagration that the L-RD ignited" (v.6). Can one even imagine that the Children of Israel would not bewail them, to the point that they had to be ordered to do so? In addition, it seems from this verse that G-d told the Children of Israel to hold a funeral service for Nadav and Avihu, which indicates that they otherwise would not have done so. Is this conceivable?

All this, in fact, is completely understandable. Nadav and Avihu wanted to be greater than Moses and Aaron, wishing that they die. They had not married because they thought that they were called to lead the Children of Israel according to the strict measure of justice, not mercy, and finally they entered into the Sanctuary in a state of drunkenness. They behaved strangely. In addition, they favorably compared themselves to Moses and Aaron. None of this pleased the Children of Israel very much, for the people saw with their own eyes that they despised Moses and Aaron, the greatest of their generation. One may therefore logically suppose that they wanted neither to bewail them nor to hold an appropriate funeral service.

This is why G-d, Who, as we know, is a fair judge that probes both heart and mind (see Jeremiah 11:20), ordered the Children of Israel to bewail Nadav and Avihu. G-d knew that Nadav and Avihu had acted only for the love of Heaven, for "Man sees what his eyes behold, but the L-RD sees into the heart" (I Samuel 16:7). He therefore said, "The entire House of Israel shall bewail the conflagration that the L-RD ignited" so that the Children of Israel could at least learn from them how to devote oneself to others when serving G-d. This should not, however, be at the expense of one's obedience to the great of the generation, for their directives should always be followed.

# IN MEMORY OF THE TZADIKIM

## RABBI YEHUDA HANASSI - RABBEINU HADODESH

Owing to the exceptional role that he was called to fulfill, Rabbi Yehuda the Prince, the son of Prince Shimon, the son of Gamliel II, is commonly known by the single word "Rabbi", for he was the teacher of all Israel. Divine Providence watched over him from the time of his early childhood. He was born on the same day that Rabbi Akiva, the most eminent man of his era, died a martyr's death. Thus were confirmed the words of Holy Scripture: "The sun rises and the sun sets" (Ecclesiastes 1:5). Rabbi Akiva's sun disappeared over the horizon, and already born was the child that, once a man, would shine like the sun (Kiddushin 72b). His father had performed the circumcision on him (at that time, under the reign of Hadrian, Jews were heavily persecuted and circumcision was strictly banned) and was thereafter denounced before the Roman authorities for doing so. He therefore had to travel to Rome to justify himself, and that voyage initiated a relationship between the Antoninus dynasty and the Prince of the Jews.

In his youth, Yehudah enjoyed the esteem of the greatest teachers, to the point that his father, in his great modesty, described him as a lion, the son of a fox (Bava Metzia 84a). Eager to learn, the young man went from one school to another in order to understand the different methods of instruction practiced by various teachers. Those to whom he owed the great part of his knowledge were Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and Rabbi Elazar ben Shamuah. He perhaps also benefited from the teaching of Rabbi Meir, or at least from one of his students.

When Rabbi succeeded his father in the role of prince, the most glorious period in the history of the Diaspora began. Holy Scripture tells that Rebecca, the mother of Esau and Jacob, been gone in her distress to inquire of Hashem concerning her pregnancy with twin sons. She received the following reply: "Two nations are in your womb" (Genesis 25:23). Our Sages connect this statement to a prophesy according to which two men, greater than all others in their time, would one day be born, and believed that it referred to Rabbi (the descendant of Jacob) and Antoninus (the descendant of Esau). Ties of the fondest friendship united these two men. Thanks to the support of the Roman Emperor, Rabbi managed to have peace and ease conferred upon his people, while he himself, owing to the favor of the Emperor, was showered with riches. Rabbi lived only for his people and the Holy Word of G-d. He studied day and night and taught without cease. He assembled about himself the country's learned men and along with them devoted himself to study. From all sides zealous students rushed to his home in Syphoris, and Rabbi fed them. During the years of scarcity, he opened his monetary coffers, as well as his food reserves, and distributed them to all who were starving, both learned and not. He worried over the education of children, especially of abandoned orphans, and entrusted them to teachers whose goal was to make of them good and upright men.

However, his crowning achievement was to have compiled and classified the Mishnah. Through this, he became a second Moses. Our great teacher Moses transmitted the Torah to us; Rabbi preserved it for us. Up to Rabbi's era, the Oral Law had not been established in a fixed manner, and for generation after generation it had been in danger of being forgotten little by little.

Rabbi Akiva had already felt the need to systematically establish the Oral Law, and we owe to him the first attempt to do so, under the name of "The Mishnah of Rabbi Akiva." His student, Rabbi Meir, continued his work, and this served as a foundation for Rabbi's undertaking. With help from his colleagues, his sons, and his students, he classified and sorted the immense material of the work. He examined and related different points in the material, separated certain texts, and arranged the entire

Oral Law into six parts, classified systematically. The first part contains all the Divine commandments that deal with agriculture and agricultural products, including the blessings for bread and fruits, as well as ordinances for prayers and communal worship. The second part consists of instructions for Shabbat and holidays, and everything pertaining to these. The third part instructs us on marriage, divorce, and vows. The fourth part contains the whole of Jewish jurisprudence, instructions concerning civil and criminal proceedings, the establishment of courts, etc. The fifth part instructs us on the sacrifices in the Beth Hamikdash, as well as on permitted and forbidden food and everything pertaining to these. Finally, the sixth part is devoted to instructions concerning the purity and impurity of garments, sicknesses, etc., as well as the laws of purity for ritual baths. Also presented are the laws of purity to be observed in married life and in everything that relates to it.

Thus, the contents of the Oral Law were listed and presented in such a way that one could easily learn them. That which was up to then an immense and non-bounded collection of specific and disparate laws had become an organized whole, where each problem found its natural place that was due to it.

Rabbi possessed all the characteristics to assume this immense task: He had the most scrupulous respect for the texts, the critical ability to separate teachings that were not in agreement with Halachah, and the necessary respect for the decisions of ancient authorities.

### EISHET CHAYIL

#### SALTING MEAT

1. Meat releases its blood only when one properly salts and rinses it. One should wash meat and leave it soaking in water for a half-hour before salting it. For the salting, one should use salt that is neither too coarse nor too fine, and one normally leaves the meat in the salt for an hour. However, one can on rare occasions be less strict, leaving the meat in the salt for twenty minutes when there are guests. In that case, one must salt the meat on both sides. One should be careful to salt the interior of fowl and sprinkle it with salt on all sides.

2. Nevertheless, one can authorize grilling meat without it having been koshered by salting beforehand.

3. After the salting of meat, one shakes it in order to get rid of the salt. It should then be rinsed twice. Some have the custom of rinsing it three times.

4. When meat has remained for more than three days without having been salted, it can only be eaten if grilled.

5. Meat can only be salted in a perforated container or on an inclined board. One normally reserves this utensil solely for the purpose of salting.

6. Since liver contains a great amount of blood, it must be grilled in order to remove the blood, then either eaten as such or cooked in another way.

7. Before grilling liver, one must thoroughly make incisions in the meat.

8. One can grill liver on an open flame (over a charcoal fire), or in an oven, but not on an electric burner that does not have a rim or that does not allow the blood to drip freely.

# PERKEI AVOTH

## ISRAEL'S MISSION

by Rav M. Lehmann ז"ל

**R**abbi [Yehuda Hanassi] said, 'Which is the right path that a man should choose for himself? That which is honorable to himself and brings him honor from man'" (Perkei Avoth 2:1).

The word "honor" (תפארת) designates on the one hand the miraculous way in which G-d directs the world, and on the other hand the life and work of Israel as G-d's tool to enlighten the world. According to the saying of Rabbi Akiva, it is also why the Torah, which corresponds to one or the other definition, is called תפארת (Berachot 58a).

It is because of this marvelous role and this unique situation that Israel is called "A kingdom of priests and a holy nation," for it is precisely this idea of holiness that is marvelous. Similarly, the light of prophesy, Ruach Hakodesh, and the miraculous variation of the laws of nature are all marvelous, as it is written, "O G-d, Your way is in sanctity; what power is as great as G-d? You are the G-d Who works wonders; You manifested Your might among the nations. With Your powerful arm You redeemed Your nation" (Psalms 77:14-16). And since G-d marvelously employs Israel with the aim of leading and governing the world according to His sage designs, the final goal of Israel is to express this marvelous government in the world. It is the prophet Isaiah who expressed himself the most clearly on this point: "Your people will all be righteous; they will inherit the land forever; a shoot of My planting, My handiwork, in which to glory" (Isaiah 60:21).

When this wondrous era will arrive, Israel will fulfill its great mission, while the entire world will recognize that this people is a seed of G-d, that it was prepared by the hands of G-d להתפאר, in order to miraculously drive humanity towards its spiritual destiny for the glory of G-d.

After this analysis, we are now in a better position to appreciate the words of our great teacher in all their beauty and depth: Which is the right path that a man should choose for

himself? That which brings about G-d designs on the governing of the world and which will at the same time make the world recognize the sublime mission of Israel as an instrument of Divine government.

Thus, on every occasion, each time that we are given a choice to make, we should ask ourselves if we are really on the right track. There are many paths available in life, and the ways of appreciating them are often very different. Many times, different paths are suggested to us and seem equally correct, yet somehow are mutually exclusive. In such cases, one must abandon all bias and every constraint of mind in order to live life based on principals that are good and proper. Our deepest and most fervent wish should be to fulfill our role as Jews, and in such a way that our actions correspond to the designs of G-d with regards to the governing of the world. It is not for nothing that G-d chose us among all the peoples of the earth; it is not for nothing that He sanctified us by His commandments. We should be for Him a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Even with respect to those things that are not forbidden to us, we should always be cognizant of our special role and chose our path accordingly. For this, it is often required that we go against our inclinations and wishes, to give up our creature comforts, and to act solely for the glory of G-d our Creator, the One Who chose us. At the same time, we should try to ensure that our noble and praiseworthy intentions not be misunderstood. And if in certain cases this proves to be impossible, consideration for G-d should precede all other factors.

Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi has, moreover, brilliantly illustrated by his life and his actions the great beauty of the saying that he formulated. He chose the path that leads to the actualization of the designs of G-d on earth. At the same time, he managed to have the great calling of Israel recognized and esteemed by his contemporaries and, at the outset, by the powerful ruler of the Romans, Emperor Antoninus.