

Shiur L'Yom Sh'lishi¹

[Tuesday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Shemini:*** **Leviticus 10:1-7**
 Haftarah: **II Samuel 6:8-11**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Acts 5:2-6**

Fire came out from the presence of the Holy One and consumed them
[Leviticus 10:2a]

Today's Meditation is Ezekiel 44:1-12;
This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is the *Kadosh* [Holiness]

Vayikchu b'nei-Aharon Nadav v'Avihu ish machtato – Then Aharon's sons Nadav and Avihu each man took his/fire pan in hand ... *vayitnu vahen aish* – and he appointed it with fire ... *vayasimu aleiha ketoret* – and he set out incense on it. **Leviticus 10:1a.**

The Holy One is doing a truly amazing – even daring - thing in *Sefer Vayikra*: He is stretching forth His scepter, as it were, to fallen humankind, inviting them - beginning with B'nei Yisrael - to get to know Him again the way Adam knew Him in Eden. He wants to make it possible for men with awestruck hearts and surrendered wills to, like Adam before the Fall, *spend quality time with Him, be energized by His Presence, and co-labor with Him in effectuating His Grand Plan for redeeming mankind from the disastrous effects of ra, shachat, and chamas and restoring Creation to its intended state of beauty, fruitfulness, and shalom.* In order to facilitate this the Holy One is opening up a delicate portal through which human beings can ascend into His Beauty Realm, experience His Majesty, absorb His Kedusha, then come back to earth as His ambassadors to the nations. He has been schooling Aharon and his sons in the protocols through which men can have Courtier-level interactions with Him with minimal danger and maximal effect. He knows that this bold 'closeness initiative' could turn out to be a wonderful, inspiring, and healing opportunity – or, if it is abused, could go horribly wrong. He is making clear that the closer we get to Him, the more essential it is that we heed warnings, respect boundaries, and only approach His Presence AS, WHEN, and HOW we are DIRECTED. After all, this is holy ground. Heaven is touching earth. Immaculate Holiness has drawn near narcissistic, serpent-venom infused human flesh, vain self-will, and self-destructive pseudo-intellect. Incomparable power is a handbreadth away from ultimate vulnerability. We must always remember that as C.S. Lewis famously wrote concerning the Holy One (represented by the lion-like character Lewis called 'Aslan'): *He is good, but He is not safe.*²

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² Lewis expressed the thought through a dialogue between Lucy and Mrs. Beaver, in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Upon seeing Aslan, the great lion, for the first time, Lucy was frightened, and

To prove the point, enter Nadav and Avihu stage right. Children, please cover your eyes. This is not going to be pretty!

***Protocols Of Approach and Communion Are Given
To Us For A Reason; There Are Lines We Simply Must Not Cross***

Nadav and Avihu - what on earth were you thinking? What possessed you to do such a thing? The Holy One is in our midst! He gave us specific, detailed instructions as to what to do – and not to do - with the special blend of *ketoret* that signals His Favor and His Presence. What you are doing with that precious substance is the exact opposite of what you were instructed. You are taking that which is holy ... and making it common. You are telling the world that the Holy One is ‘in’, and approves of, something which you dreamed up in your own fruit-of-the-tree-of-knowledge corrupted mind, and desired in your own fleshly heart. As the Holy One cried out poignantly to Adam in the Garden, after he and Chava did a similar thing, *Eiyeicha?* Where ... are ... you?

***The Holy Clouds of Ketoret vs.
the Profane Hype of the Human-Engineered Smoke Machine***

Near the end of the *Mish'kan Discourse* the Holy One gave specific instructions regarding the formulation and extremely limited uses of the special incense compound that was to be used on the golden altar, inside the holy place. The purpose of this incense was to create beautiful, fragrant ‘clouds of glory’ that would prepare the way for the Holy One’s entrance, evidence His Presence, and indicate His Abiding Favor. Because of the incredible level of *kedusha* [pulsing holiness energy] that this blend of sweet spices, stacte, onycha, galbanum and frankincense, *salted, pure, and holy* – represented and announced, the Holy One made it clear that it was never, ever, under any circumstances to be used for any other purpose. It was not to be used just any way that might *seem right* to the fruit-of-the-tree-of-knowledge poisoned human mind or be deemed desirable by the flesh-corrupted human heart. See Exodus 30:34-38.

But prohibited use of *ketoret* is just the culmination of Nadav and Avihu’s problems. There were also dangerous precedents in danger of being set because of *where they got the fire they employed* – and why they of all people, consecrated kohanim of the Holy One that they were, chose to disregard the Holy One’s instructions totally, go rogue, and do things ‘their way’.

We Didn’t Start the Fire

Yesterday we read that on the 8th day of the *Mish'kan* era the Holy One did an

whispered to Mrs. Beaver, “*Is he safe?*” Mrs. Beaver replied, “*Safe? Of course he’s not safe! But he is good; he’s the King, I tell you!*”

amazing thing. First He ‘appeared’ – to all the people! Then, He actually brought fire from His Presence – i.e. holy fire – and used it to ignite an *aish tamid* – i.e. eternal fire – on the brazen altar. As Torah told the story:

... chevod-Adonai el-kol ha-am

... the glory of the Holy One appeared to all the people.

V'teitze aish mil'fnei Adonai

and there came forth fire from the Presence of the Holy One

V'tochal al ha-mizbe'ach et ha-olah v'et ha-chalavim

and it consumed the korban olah and the fat upon the altar

vayar kol-ha-am vayaronu v'yiplu al-p'nei hem
and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.
[Leviticus 9:23-24]

When the Holy One released *aish* [fire] from the Throne-Room of Heaven to light the *Mish'kan*'s brazen altar everyone in the camp saw it. Every man, woman, and child in the Redeemed Community stood in awe as the wonderful truth that the pathway to the tree of life might has been/will be/is made accessible to us again was revealed. We saw tongues of *aish kadosh* – i.e. *holy fire*. It was beautiful. It was awe-inspiring. It declared *Imanu-El* – i.e. God is *with us*. It meant that the portals of Heaven were open over us. It meant that something fresh from the Heavenly Throne Room was being entrusted to flesh and blood human beings on planet earth. On real men was bestowed the honor of experiencing firsthand – and becoming custodians of - the supernatural flame of Heaven. It was a dramatic *ot* – i.e. a *covenant sign* declaring '*peace on earth, goodwill toward man*'. It signified wonderful things for mankind as a species, as well as for all Creation.

Alas in today's aliyah we find that such accessibility is a special privilege granted *according to the Holy One's Divinely breathed protocol exclusively*. Such is the case with all the precious gifts of Heaven. It is that way with the gift of *shalom*; with the precious gift of Heaven's *shalom* comes the responsibility to become wise and faithful *shalom*-sowers and peacemakers wherever we go on the earth. It is the same way with the precious gift of forgiveness; with that gift comes the solemn responsibility to turn around and become the most extravagant forgiveness-dispensers on earth. The same can be said of wisdom, and understanding, and counsel, and might, and knowledge, and the fear of YHVH. The same can be said of the calling to be a *kohen*; it is not just an honor – it is a solemn responsibility to live a selfless, un-offendable, holy and fully surrendered life. It is the same way with the calling to prophesy, to teach, to heal, to acquire and distribute wealth, to bring reconciliation and restoration and wholeness, etc. it is the same with the precious Heavenly gifts of love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness/kindness, and self-control. Each of these is given to us as a seed-kit. We are to take what we have been given and turn around and sow them into the lives as others. They are just seeds of the Kingdom of Heaven. With them comes the responsibility to plant, water, cultivate, protect, and nurture them to produce a Kingdom Garden for the Holy One. Freely we have received the gifts of Heaven - freely we are now compelled to give them.

Here is an unchanging truth about the Kingdom of Heaven:

*With each new level of kingdom revelation, experience,
and/or intimacy comes new levels of both kingdom responsibility
and kingdom accountability.*

These gifts we receive from Heaven are not ours to do with whatever way may appeal to our mind or please our flesh. Title never passes to us. We just become stewards. We just become carriers. We just get these treasures in earthen vessels. And it is always the instructions of the Holy One – not our own ideas of what should happen – that has to control their use.

In today's aliyah the two oldest sons of Aharon will learn that the hard way. They will discover that along with the high calling and inestimable privilege of serving as Keepers of the Holy Flame comes *an amazingly high degree of accountability*. Heaven's release of Throne-Room Flame upon earth has a very specific purpose. Like the special oil of anointing and the special formula of incense that were formulated only for use according to the Holy One's instructions, so the Flame of Heaven is to be handled and employed by the Holy One's *kohanim* in *sh'ma* response to a specific directive from Heaven.

The *cherub* of Genesis 3:24 still has instructions to strike with his flaming sword anyone who attempts to charge the gates of heaven *without invitation, according to his own will, in his own time, for his own purposes, and by means and protocols that contradict the Holy One's very specific instructions*. ***Who may ascend the hill of the Holy One? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive blessing from the Holy One, And righteousness from the God of his salvation.*** Psalm 24:4-5.

No one who arrogantly – or foolishly – presumes to do things related to the Kingdom of Heaven '*their way*' has any idea of the power and consequences of what they are dealing with. For the Holy One has warned: ***By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified.*** Leviticus 10:3.

A Proud Look

In the aliyah of Torah we read yesterday we found that as holy fire from the Presence of the Holy One fell at the *Mish'kan* on the 8th day all the people gathered at the Tent that day fell on their faces in reverent fear and awe. Leviticus 9:24 tells us: ***When all the people saw [it] they shouted and fell on their faces.*** But two men – two men who should have known better - apparently did not stay on their faces. For Torah tells us:

Vayikchu v'nei-Aharon Nadav va'Avihu ish machtato

But Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon each man brought forth his censer

vayitnu vahen aish vayasimu aleiha k'toret

and he put fire in it, and he placed incense on it,

vayakrivu lifnei Adonai aish zarah
and he presented strange fire before the Holy One

asher lo tzivah otam
when He had instructed them not to do so.

Vateitze aish mil'fnei Adonai
And fire came forth from before the Holy One,

V'tochal otam v'yamutu lifnei Adonai
and devoured them, and they died before the Holy One.
[Leviticus 10:1-2]

Up to this moment these two nephews of Moshe had to have been considered the most likely candidates to succeed Aharon as *kohen gadol* [high priest]. Just a few months ago they had been specially chosen by the Holy One to accompany Moshe, Aharon and the tribal elders up onto Mount Sinai for a Divine Encounter the likes of which few men have ever experienced. They - not their younger brothers Elazar and Itamar – had been afforded the privilege of actually *seeing* the God of Israel. They got to gaze upon His Heavenly Throne. They were able to eat and drink in His Presence – without being the slightest bit harmed. **Exodus 24:9-11**. But all that had been *by Divine Invitation*, according to *Divine Protocol*. What they did on the 8th day, on the other hand, was the antithesis. Theirs was a totally inappropriate response to the Bridegroom-King's precious gifts to His People of both His *Manifest Presence* and His *Holy Fire*.

We are not told why Nadav and Avihu did what they did. Perhaps they were just caught up in the excitement of the moment. Or perhaps, back when they were slaves, they had seen the priests of Egypt or Midyan put fire in censers and put on a smoke and mirrors show, and were just following the routine. Or perhaps they, like the magicians of Pharaoh's court, just wanted to see if they could duplicate what the Holy One had done – no matter who it hurt, or how badly it misrepresented the Divine Persona, counteracted the Instructions, and subverted the Plan of the Holy One. But whatever Nadav and Avihu's *motivation* may have been, their *actions* were brash, reckless and uncalled-for. They showed brazen disrespect toward the Holy One and the protocols of approach He had established. They insisted on doing it *their way*, for *their glory*.

***Sh'ma-ing His Voice Means Awaiting His Orders –
And Not Acting On Our Own Volition***

Even as the fire kindled from Heaven burned on the altar, for reasons that will never fully be known by us, these two specially appointed kingdom ambassadors broke rank with their brethren. Aharon, Elazar and Itamar continued to lay prostrate before the Holy One, awaiting instructions from Heaven as to when and how to approach the fire. But Nadav and Avihu were apparently listening to the

voice of another. Ignoring all the detailed protocols the Holy One had lovingly established for Aharon and his sons, Nadav and Avihu *arose* and *did what seemed right and pleasing to them*. In this case that meant to take up censers [Hebrew, *mach'tah*], put incense in them, and by their own effort produce something Torah calls '*aish zerah*' - usually translated into English as 'strange fire'.

There was no time for Moshe or Aharon to stop them. In an instant the same fire from Heaven that had just moments before engulfed the flesh and grain on the brazen altar likewise engulfed them. Mercifully, it was all over in a millisecond. It does not appear that Nadav and Avihu had time to suffer. They probably never knew what hit them. But hit them it did. And now, in an instant, they were gone forever.

That Which Is Made According to the Instructions of the Holy One Endures the Fire

Note however a peculiar thing about this incident. The inspired narrative indicates that when men were dispatched to remove the bodies of Nadav and Avihu from the Camp: *they went near and carried them by their tunics out of the camp*

Nadav and Avihu spontaneously combusted, but amazingly the tunics they were wearing – those special linen garments of righteousness that Betzalel and Ohaliav had crafted for them exactly as the Holy One had instructed Moshe - did not burn. That which is made and done in *sh'ma* response to the Voice and Direction of the Holy One is tested and proven by the fire, not consumed by it. As Shaul of Tarsus would later write, *Each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is*. 1 Corinthians 3:13. But that is the fire of the Holy One. What about 'strange fire'?

Defining – And Examining Our Own Lives For Signs Of – Aish Zarah ['Strange Fire']

How can we make sense of – and learn from – the Nadav and Avihu experience? Perhaps it will help if we explore the Hebraic meaning of the fateful phrase forever associated with those two sons of Aharon – a phrase we have come to know in the English language as '*strange fire*'.

Inherently we sense that for the Holy Fire to have consumed *Nadav* and *Avihu* as we are told it did they must have done something *terribly wrong*. And yet to us today - centuries, language, and cultures removed – the substance of their transgression is not immediately obvious. We are, after all, very much accustomed to men doing religious stuff their way, in total disregard for what the Holy One has said in Torah. Indeed, if we are honest we would all acknowledge that most of

what is done today in the name of ‘Christianity’ and a pretty good portion of what is done in the name of ‘Judaism’, in reality consists of flesh-pleasing traditions of ‘man’ which are nowhere mentioned in, much less directed by, Scripture.

Indeed, in comparison to some of the things most modern Christians and Jews do in the name of religion – all the pagan holidays they choose to clean up and pass off as self-proclaimed ‘festivals to the Holy One’, all the man-made rules of religious service and gatherings they follow and insist others follow, etc. – quite frankly what Nadav and Avihu did that day so long ago at Mount Sinai seems to us ... well, somewhat *petty* and *insignificant*.

A little incense in a censor? Adding a little spark of their own volition? Compared to *changing the Holy One’s appointed times* and *throwing out whole books He inspired as ‘superseded’*, and calling the people He declared to be blessed and chosen forever to be cursed and rejected forever instead, was putting a little incense in a censor and adding a little spark of fire to it *really so bad*? These are fair questions. And to respond to them it behooves us to give some serious consideration to what exactly the problem with what Nadav and Avihu did really was.

1. What Do the Sages Say?

As usual, the commentators are not in agreement³. In the Midrash *Vayikra Rabbah* Rabbi Yishmael opines that Nadav and Avihu were intoxicated when they approached the altar [though this is not stated in the text] and that their inappropriate intoxication was the reason their judgment was so severe. But does this make sense? Intoxication is in no wise commendable, of course, and an injunction against priests drinking intoxicating beverages while on duty in the *Mish’kan* – with a specific warning of a death penalty for violation - is indeed given to Aharon immediately after Nadav and Avihu’s deaths⁴. But surely if intoxication was the problem with Nadav and Avihu, Torah would have told us so in no uncertain terms. Instead Torah directs our attention to the substance of what they *did* that fateful day – not what they did or did not have to drink.

2. What do the Actual Hebrew Words of the Inspired Narrative Say?

What Torah tells us Nadav and Avihu did that resulted in the death of was to *present something the Hebrew text calls aish zarah*. Often translated as "strange fire", this phrase is perhaps better understood as alien fire *before the Holy One ...*

³ Of course, commentators seldom if ever agree on anything significant. That is why one must ultimately read, study, meditate and pray for Divine Illumination for himself or herself.

⁴ Leviticus 10:8-9 in the Complete Jewish Bible reads: *ADONAI said to Aharon, "Don't drink any wine or other intoxicating liquor, neither you nor your sons with you, when you enter the tent of meeting, so that you will not die. This is to be a permanent regulation through all your generations"*

*which he had instructed them not to do*⁵.

Zarah is a Hebrew adjective derived from the verb root *zur*⁶. The verb means to *alienate*, in the context of to *make abhorrent*. *Aish zarah* would be fire which was of *alien*, or *foreign* origin, in the sense of being abhorrent to the Holy One, to His Torah, and to His plan for the *Mish'kan* to become not only the parlor for betrothal period interactions between the Holy One and His Beloved, but also center stage for the great passion play pursuant to which the Holy One planned to reveal His plan of Messianic redemption to all mankind.

3. What Does the Context Say?

Remember *the context*. The Holy One has just sent *fire from Heaven* – i.e. *holy fire* – to the altar of the *Mish'kan*. An inferno of divine origin had been entrusted to Aharon and his sons in stewardship. They had been assigned the honor and responsibility of being the *Keepers of the Flame*. They were to use this holy fire to the exclusion of all other flames [i.e. man-made ones] for the service of the *Mish'kan*. They were to keep the fire the Holy One had poured out burning by stoking it with wood as needed and by keeping its ashes cleaned out.

The holy fire the Divine Bridegroom had sent from Heaven was to be the *point of connection* between the *Mish'kan* of the spiritual realm where the Great High Priest of Heaven ministered and the earthly 'shadowbox' *mish'kan*, where the Aharonic priests were supposed to merely present a shadowy pantomime. In context therefore *strange or alien fire* would appear to be *fire other than the holy fire that the Holy One had just sent from Heaven*. In context strange or alien fire would appear to be fire of *human origin* – produced by human activity independent of the Holy One. It would appear to be fire induced by man's way of thinking, probably affected by *foreign influences*, and *definitely kindled in response to other voices than the voice of the Holy One*. *Strange or alien fire* would appear to be fire kindled by *man's hand*, according to *man's plans*, and *for man's pleasure* – *instead of the Holy One's*. This was the 'dark side' of the spiritual legacy which Nadav and Avihu's father Aharon established for them back in Exodus 32. This was after all the legacy and extension of 'golden calf' worship.

Though they had specific instructions from the Holy One as to what they were to do to worship the Holy One, Nadav and Avihu – as had their father a few months previously - *came up with their own plan*. They refused to either *sh'ma* the Holy One's Voice or submit to the Holy One's redemptive Plan. They refused the Holy

⁵ Note: the *aish zarah* [strange, or alien, fire] of this narrative should perhaps be considered in connection with the prohibition of *ktoret zarah* [strange or foreign incense] announced in Exodus 30:7.

⁶ *Zur* is *zayin*, *vav*, *resh*. It is Strong's Hebrew word #2114.

One's precious gift of supernatural fire and substituted for their 'worship' activities *natural fire* of their own design and of their own making. Perhaps they had seen foreign pagan religious practices that they liked or which they thought would appeal to the people and tried to 'redeem' those pagan foreign practices and employ them in the worship of the Holy One. Hence Moshe remarked the instant it happened: *'This is exactly what the Holy One meant when he said, I will be sanctified among those close to Me, and I will thus be glorified.'* Leviticus 10:3.

Doing Things Our Way – vs. Doing Things The Bridegroom's Way

What possessed Nadav and Avihu to do what they did? What led them to take censor in hand and try to approach the Holy One outside the God-given protocol? Do you *really want to know*? You might want to sit down, then, before reading any further. What possessed Nadav and Avihu to do what they did, you see, is the very same mindset that possesses people today. What possessed them was the same mindset that comes up with *meeting schedules* and *routines* and *ministry activities* and programs of *growth* and *education* that are not contained within the Holy One's Torah.

What possessed Nadav and Avihu that fateful day was the same mindset that today enabled religious organizations to run – and prosper – under the impetus of *human willpower*, *worldly fundraising techniques*, *natural charisma* and *slave labor* rather than the supernatural fire of the Holy One. What possessed Nadav and Avihu to do what they did is the same mindset that looks at pagan holidays, religious practices, and music, and secular philosophies, organizational structures, and mediums of entertainment, changes a few words or adds a few spiritual-sounding catchphrases, and calls it 'worship', 'accountability', or 'evangelism'. What possessed Nadav and Avihu to do what they did is the same mindset that rejects the Torah and accepts in its place the un-Biblical doctrines and teachings and practices of men.

A Solemn Warning

The Holy One had the story of Nadav and Avihu recorded in the Torah for us for a reason. It serves as a warning to us - not to either *add to* or *subtract from* the Torah's instructions for worshipping the Holy One. As the Voice of the Holy One says in Deuteronomy 12:32: *Whatever I instruct you, be careful to do it: Do not add thereto, nor diminish from it.*

The writer of Proverbs cautions similarly:

*Every word of God [is] pure:
He [is] a shield unto them that put their trust in him.
Do not add to his words, lest he reprove you and you be found a liar.
[Proverbs 30:5-6]*

The scribe who recorded the Revelation of the Messiah concluded:

... Every man is to sh'ma the words of the prophecy of this book,
 If any man shall add unto these things,
 God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.
 And if any man takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy,
 God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city,
 and [from] the things that are written in this book.

[Revelation 22:18-19]

The Holy One provides all the fire we need. We are to *embrace* that fire, *submit* to it, and *invite it into every aspect of our lives*.

Cleaning Up the Mess – and Going On With Life

The tragedy of Nadav and Avihu's deaths rocked the Redeemed Community to its core, and people feared the Holy One. But in the midst of the shock and awe *someone had to clean up the mess*. Alas, it is always so.

Vayikra Moshe el-Misha'el v'el Eltzafan b'nei Uzi'el dod Aharon

Moshe summoned Mishael and Eltzafan, the sons of Aharon's uncle Uzziel,

vayomer aleihem kirvu sei's et-acheichem me'et p'nei-ha-kodesh

and said to them, 'Come, and remove your close relatives from the sanctuary.

el-michutz l'machaneh

[Bring them] outside the camp.'

Vayikreivu vayisa'um b'chutanotam el-michutz l'machaneh

They came and carried [Nadav and Avihu] outside the camp, in their tunics,

ka'asher diber Moshe

as Moshe had said.

[Leviticus 10:4-5]

You will see a similar 'mess-cleaning' occurrence, in similar circumstances, in today's reading from chapter 5 of the chronicle of Yeshua's *talmidim* we have come to know as the 'Book of Acts'.

Of 'Surgical Excision' - The Holy One's Way

At this point it probably behooves us to pose a question other people may be asking. That question is: *Is the Holy One a righteous judge?* We are actually in good company in asking such a question. For Shaul of Tarsus asked it as well – albeit rhetorically:

Is God unrighteous who inflicts wrath? I speak like men do.

May it never be! For then how will God judge the world?

[Romans 3:5-6]

Nadav and Avihu died with incense in their censers. Uzzah died trying to steady the holy ark and keep it from falling off a cart. *Hananyah* [Ananias] and *Sefirah* [Sapphira] died in the course of making a voluntary 'gift' to further the work of the apostles of Messiah Yeshua. Each attempted to do 'God-stuff' in his or her 'own

way’ – in a way the Holy One had most-definitely not commanded. Each in his or her own way failed to respect the boundaries and protocols the Holy One had established in His Torah. And to disrespect the Holy One’s Word – or the boundaries and protocols He has established in Torah – is to disrespect the Holy One Himself.

This ‘representing God’ stuff’ is *serious business*. And here is a truth that is hard for us to comprehend - *death sometimes comes at the hand of no man – but as a judgment from the Holy One Himself*. In a ‘surgical incision’ the Holy One sometimes takes one, or two, or such number as He deems necessary and appropriate out of this world. They are here one moment, gone the next. The Holy One never asks us beforehand if we think it is necessary or appropriate. He does not usually leave a note explaining why He determined such a strike to be necessary.

The issue is not a lack of love or mercy or kindness on the part of the Holy One. He is infinitely wise and He is infinitely good. And sometimes for reasons we do not yet understand the wisest, kindest, most loving thing He could do is remove a person – or two – or more – from life as we know it. Such things happen both before *and after* the death of Messiah on the Roman execution stake most call “the Cross”. *Hananyah* [Ananias] and his wife both perished in the so-called *church age*. The same God Who surgically struck Nadav, Avihu, and Uzzah [among others] surgically struck them as well who both *claimed Messiah as their Savior* and *received the impartation of Divine Breath* our English Bibles call the ‘Holy Spirit’.

How can we who live in the 21st Century can claim any more exemption from such surgical excision than the ones mentioned in this week’s Torah, haftarah, or *B’rit Chadasha*? How are we better than they? How? Know before Whom you stand. Our very lives are in His Hands. We draw each at His discretion, by His permission. If the lifestyle choices we make leave Him no other way consistent with His glory and His grand plan of redemption but to take us out by *surgical strike*, there is no room for complaint. With the choice comes the consequences the Holy One determines are necessary and appropriate for the greater good.

So what do we do? We *choose a better way* than did Nadav and Avihu. We choose to *sh’ma* the Voice of the Holy One. We choose to worship Him, and served mankind, in *His* way – instead of insisting on doing “God-stuff” any old way that *seems right* to us and calls attention to us instead of giving glory to Him.

***The Issue In the Nadav and Avihu Narrative
Was Most Definitely Not the Rules of “Spiritual Authority”
To be Followed In Churches or Synagogues***

Before we leave the Nadav and Avihu narrative there is one more thing we need to discuss. Some have taught, particularly in charismatic and Evangelical Christian circles, that the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, as well as *Hananyah* [Ananias] and *Sefirah* [Sapphira], came as the result of *failing to recognize or accept the “spiritual authority”* of Aharon, in the first instance, and *Kefa* [Peter], in the second instance. The narrative of Nadav and Avihu’s death is even sometimes employed by pastors, elders, deacons, and boards of church governance to suggest that failure to do whatever they say, whenever and however they say it, is the equivalent of mortal sin – a treasonous rebellion against the Kingdom of Heaven.

This premise is not only insupportable by Scripture, but also downright dangerous. It is the kind of clear misuse of Scripture that you could expect to culminate in cult-like, unquestioning obedience to fallible men. True leaders who have been called, commissioned and anointed by the Holy One and operate in His *Ruach Ha-Qodesh* do not by any means need to intimidate and manipulate followers by twisting Scripture. It is only insecure, self-centered men driven by the flesh who feel the need – or take advantage of the opportunity their position affords - to insist upon mindless obedience to their every directive.

Not one of the deaths we read about this week in Torah, in the haftarah, and in the B’rit Chadasha was a case of “spiritual rebellion” against a human being who had been placed in a leadership position above them. In each of the cases of divine judgment we read about this week [Nadav and Avihu, Uzzah, and Hananyah and Sefirah] the people who died by ‘surgical strike’ from on High had *one thing in common* – they sought to approach the holiness of the Holy One without reverencing, and in total disregard of, His *Torah*. *In each case, it was disregard for the Holy One and His Torah - not “disobeying” men holding positions of ‘spiritual authority’ - which brought about the judgment of the Holy One.*

The Holy One has given us *specific instructions* in the Torah about how to approach him (in the case of Nadav and Avihu), and regarding what one must do when [a] approaching Him through *korbanot* [Leviticus chapters 1-5, 19:5-8] and when [b] bearing witness before the community on a matter [Leviticus 19:11-13, among other provisions]. The lesson we are to learn from our readings this week, therefore, is that we are to *reverence the Holy One and His Divine instructions* which are given to us for our good at all times.

As Moshe made it clear when discussing this event, the point the Holy One was

emphasizing in relation to this event was: *By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy*; and *before all the people I must be glorified*. Leviticus 10:3.

We are not to blindly and blithely conform to the directives of preachers, rabbis, popes or muftis, or to honor any directive of man that ignores or contradicts the Holy One's Torah⁷. We must give appropriate honor for teachers who diligently labor on our behalf – but we must, nevertheless, *cling only to the Holy One's eternal word*.

Learning to Recognize 'Strange Fire' In Our Own Religious Worlds

The “fire” of Nadav and Avihu is called “*strange*” fire. This description, as presented to us in English, does not tell us much. Let us therefore look at the phrase Hebraically. As aforesaid, the Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as “strange” is *zarah*⁸. The word *zarah* is usually translated to mean *a stranger, alien, foreigner, or enemy*. It is from the root verb *zur*, meaning *to turn aside, depart* - especially from God. The root can also mean *to press, to squeeze, or to press out*.

What is *zarah*, then? *Zarah* is that way of thinking and behaving that *honors the efforts of man*, and thereby *dishonors* the Holy One. It is *a way at enmity with, and which always works at cross-purposes with, the Holy One's way*.

The Hebrew Pictograph - Zarah

This is pictured well by the Hebrew letter combination that makes up the Hebrew word *zarah*. The *zayin* [which makes what we in English identify as a ‘z’ sound] is a picture of a *sword or war axe*. The *resh* [which makes what we in English identify as an ‘r’ sound] is a picture of a man's head. The *hey* [which makes what we in English identify as the ‘h’ sound] is a picture of a window in a desert shepherd's tent which yields both inspiration [fresh air and ventilation] and revelation [seeing what is going on in one's life]. Put them together and you have a *sword or war axe* held to the *head of a man* resulting in *inspiration and revelation*.

Here is the revelation: *acts and practices that mimic worship, but are aimed at the mind or head, are not worship*. They may look good on the outside, but they lead to death. Elsewhere it is said, *There is a way that seems right to a man, but it*

⁷ When I use the word “Torah” in this context, I am referring to the entire canon of the Bible, including the apostolic Scriptures. I am, however, referring to the *original manuscripts*, in their original language, not to any Greek or English translation extant today. Translation is a very, very difficult task. Every translator, intentionally or unintentionally, necessarily imposes both his own theology and his worldview upon Scripture. The theology and worldview of translators is not Torah, nor is it inspired in any regard.

⁸ *Zarah* is *zayin, resh, hey*. It is Strong's Hebrew word # 2214.

leads to death.

All that men call “worship” is not worship, and all that men call “service to God” is not service to God. Alas much of it is *aish zarah* - “strange fire”.

The Challenge Presented by the Prevalence of ‘Strange Fire’ In the Religious World Today

Did you ever see the classic 1956 movie version of Rodgers and Hammerstein musical ‘*The King and I*’? My favorite scene from that movie/play is the one in which Yul Brynner, playing the self-consumed King of Siam, pompously informs the young English woman he has recently hired to tutor the children of his many wives: *You shall bow when I say bow, and you shall sit when I say sit - et cetera, et cetera, et cetera!*”

In this day and age voices that sound amazingly like this famous Yul Brynner line call to us from every religion, movement, and denomination, telling us how we are to think, speak, believe, act, and worship. Many of the voices proclaiming such things are loud, sound authoritative, and are often persuasive to the point of being coercive. They hold what constitutes the spiritual equivalent of a sword or war axe to our heads. “*You shall bow when we say bow and you shall sit when we say sit – et cetera, et cetera, et cetera*”, they declare.

If anyone dares to *question their doctrines*, or *stop dancing to their music*, or dares to *decline their invitation to participate in their particular humanly constructed model of ‘community’*.... well, let’s just say even a scorned woman has no such fury! Yeshua summed it up well:

*To what then will I liken the people of this generation? What are they like?
They are like children who sit in the marketplace,
and call one to another, saying,
‘We piped to you, and you didn’t dance. We mourned, and you didn’t weep.’*

[Luke 7:31-32]

*Beware of men: for they will deliver you up to councils,
and in their synagogues they will scourge you.
Yes, and you will be brought before governors and kings for My sake,
for a testimony to them and to the Goyim.*

[Matthew 10:17-18]

So be it then - if, when, and to the extent it be His Will. Strive to know *the greater fear!* The point is merely this: *Train yourself to Fear the Holy One, and Him ALONE!* Do not be afraid of or intimidated by the inevitable accusations of heresy that will be levied against you. Yeshua knew such accusations well. Reverence *His Words*. Study *them*, meditate on *them*, get as intimate with *them* as you are with Him - and let His Words become the center-of-gravity of your thought life, your

speech, and your conduct. *Cherish* and *treasure* and *carefully guard* and *keep vigil* over each of the Holy One's instructions for living. And let *the Holy One* – not some man or some religion - teach you how the King of Glory, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, deserves - and desires - to be worshipped.

Torah is the Master's Voice. The life of Messiah is the *Master's footprint*. Stay united with both. If you allow yourself to get distracted, and stray from either far enough that you become dangerous to yourself and others, and refuse to heed warnings of an imminent disaster, well – let's just say that *surgical strikes are definitely still in the realm of possibility*.

A Step in the Right Direction

A good start toward a lifestyle governed by a '*greater fear*' might be to focus on the Amidah prayer focus for next week – *Da'at*, the *Petition for Knowledge*. For *only from Heaven* can come the knowledge we need to discern between that which is *of God*, on the one hand, and that which is '*strange fire*' on the other.

Honor and respect those who offer you teachings, of course. At the same time, however, do not *blindly* accept any one's teaching or doctrine. Do not surrender your adulation, your praise, or your worship to any man or any man's 'ministry'. Your adulation, praise, and worship are a precious gift which you as a pure spotless Bride are to present *only to your divine Bridegroom*. Likewise do not be quick to throw out toward men either *accolades* or *accusations of heresy*. Beware of anyone who regularly does either. Those who do so simply do not yet walk in the '*greater fear*' to which we are called.

Live your life in *sh'ma* response to the Holy One and His Torah – not on the basis of knee jerk flesh reactions to things you do – or do not – like, or on the basis of whether things you see or hear do or do not fit within your 'theology'. And be so versed in Torah, and so committed to it, that you can say, as did Shaul of Tarsus when he declared to those among those in Rome who were falsely suggesting that the Sinaitic covenant had been or should be abandoned: ... ***let God be found true but every man a liar***. Romans 3:4.

Questions For Today's Study

1. We will look first at the deaths of Aharon's sons *Nadav* and *Avihu*.

[A] Go back and read Exodus 30:7-10. What were to be the circumstances under which incense was to be offered?

[B] How did what Nadav and Avihu did violate these instructions?

[C] How do you think the discussion between Aharon and Moshe in verses 16-19 relates to the death of Nadav and Avihu?

[D] In verse 3 Moshe quotes some of the words the Holy One spoke to him prior to the meeting on Mount Sinai to explain the death of Nadav and Avihu. What verse does he quote? [Give book, chapter, and verse]

[E] How were Nadav and Avihu removed from the Tabernacle?

[F] Where were their bodies taken?

[G] What outward signs and acts of mourning were forbidden to Aharon, Elazar and Itamar?

[H] Does this Torah passage help you understand Yeshua's words in Matthew 8:21-22 [culminating in the oft-repeated phrase, "let the dead bury their dead"]? Explain.

2. This week's haftarah focuses upon the efforts of *David Melech*, the King of all Israel, to bring the "ark of the testimony" to Mount Zion, in the "City of David" – Jerusalem. Note first of all that Mount Zion was not chosen by the Holy One as the resting place of the Ark – instead, *Mount Moriyah*, where Avraham presented Yitzchak to the Holy One] was the place where the Holy One had chosen to place His Name. David was a man "after the Holy One's own heart", and the "sweet psalmist of Israel", but his lack of comprehension of and adherence to Torah should humble us all.

We can draw comfort, however, in the fact that even though David spent years totally misunderstanding – and, it appears, ignoring – Torah, the Holy One still loved David and blessed him, and consented to continue to use him to reveal His Glory to the world. Yesterday we saw that the big show David arranged to bring the ark to Jerusalem [the procession of 30,000 dignitaries, accompanied by the most talented musicians in the kingdom] resulted in absolute disaster – the death of Uzzah by Divine judgment. Today, we are given insight into David's reaction to the death of Uzzah. Here is our aliyah:

*David was displeased because the Holy One had broken forth on Uzzah;
and he called that place Peretz-Uzzah, to this day.*

*David was afraid of the Holy One that day; and he said,
"How shall the ark of the Holy One come to me?"*

*So David would not remove the ark of the Holy One to him into the city of David;
but David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite.*

*The ark of the Holy One remained in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months:
and the Holy One blessed Obed-edom and all his house.*

[II Samuel 6:8-11]

[A] What two emotions does the Haftarah say David experienced.

[B] Explain why he experienced these two emotions.

[C] What does the Torah say about the way the ark is to be moved?

[D] Where did David take the ark after Uzzah's death?

[E] What happened in that place as a result of the ark's presence there?

[F] How long did the ark remain there?

3. We now turn to the Apostolic Scriptures, and the events surrounding the death of Hananyah [Ananias], husband of Sefirah [Sapphira].

*... a certain man named Hananyah, with Sefirah, his wife,
sold a possession and kept back part of the price, his wife also being aware of it,
and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.
But Kefa [Peter] said, "Hananyah, why has HaSatan filled your heart
to lie to the Ruach HaKodesh and to keep back part of the price of the land?
While you kept it, didn't it remain your own? After it was sold, wasn't it in your power?
How is it that you have conceived this thing in your heart?
You haven't lied to men, but to God." Hananyah, hearing these words,
fell down and died. And great fear came on all who heard these things.*

[Acts 5:1-6]

[A] What did Kefa [Peter] say had filled the heart of Hananyah [Ananias]?

[B] What two sin(s) did Kefa point out to Hananyah by word of knowledge?

[C] How does the Bible describe the death of Hananyah?

[D] What does the Bible say was the reaction of the people present to this event?

*May the people of the Holy One fear God, and cling to His Torah's instructions
For life and for worship, recognizing the grace, love and Wisdom of the Holy One
which His instructions for living contain.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Ezekiel 44:1-12

*Then he brought me back by the way of the outer gate of the sanctuary,
which looks toward the east; and it was shut. The Holy One said to me,
"This gate will be shut; it will not be opened, neither will any man enter in by it;
for the Holy One, the God of Yisra'el, has entered in by it; therefore it will be shut.
As for the prince, he will sit therein as prince to eat bread before the Holy One;
he will enter by the way of the porch of the gate, and will go out by the way of the same.*

*Then he brought me by the way of the north gate before the house;
and I looked and behold, the glory of the Holy One filled the house of the Holy One:
and I fell on my face. The Holy One said to me, Son of man, mark well,
and see with your eyes, and hear with your ears all that I tell you
concerning all the ordinances of the house of the Holy One, and all the laws of it;
and mark well the entrance of the house, with every exit of the sanctuary.
Tell the rebellious, even to the house of Yisra'el,
Thus says the Holy One GOD: you house of Yisra'el,
let it suffice you of all your abominations, in that you have brought in foreigners,
uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in my sanctuary,
to profane it, even my house, when you approach Me with bread, with fat and with blood,
and they have broken my covenant, [to add] to all your abominations.*

*You have not kept the charge of my holy things;
but you have set keepers of my charge in my sanctuary for yourselves.*

The Holy One GOD therefore says:

*No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, is to enter into
my sanctuary, of any foreigners who are among the children of Yisra'el.*

*But the Levites who went far from Me when Yisra'el went astray,
who went astray from me after their idols, they will bear their iniquity.*

*Yet they will be ministers in my sanctuary, having oversight at the gates of the house,
and ministering in the house: they will kill the olah and the korban for the people,
and they will stand before them to minister to them.*

*Because they ministered to them before their idols, and became a stumbling block of iniquity
to the house of Yisra'el; therefore have I lifted up my hand against them,
says the Holy One GOD, and they will bear their iniquity.*