



## DEATHS OF NADAV &amp; AVIHU: THE AVODAH OF HISKALELUS

*Parshas Shmini* begins with the verse ויהי ביום השמיני “And it was on the eighty day.” The *Gemara* says that whenever the Torah uses the word /ויהי/ “And it was”, it suggests something painful that transpired. In this week’s *parshah*, what painful event transpired? The *Gemara* identifies it as the deaths of the two older sons of Aharon HaKohen, Nadav and Avihu,<sup>1</sup> who were punished by death by Hashem [for entering the *Kodesh Kodashim*].

The simple understanding is that it was a painful time, due to the deaths of Nadav and Avihu. According to this understanding, it was pain in the simple sense. But there is a deeper understanding, that the deaths of Nadav and Avihu were a form of the “kiss of death” of Hashem [the most sublime form of death possible which is reserved for the greatest *tzaddikim*], and therefore, they died out of the sheer experience of unifying and integrating their being with Hashem. They did not die in the usual sense.

The simple type of death is when the body and soul are separated from each other, where a separation is created. Normally, death is a power of *tzimtzum*/constriction, which causes separation, the opposite of connection. However, on an inner level, we explained earlier that *tzimtzum*/constriction is a form of unification, so there is an inner level of death which is experienced as “Kiss me with the kisses of Your mouth” – the bonding of the soul of a created being, with its Creator.

The “pain” which the people felt because of the deaths of Nadav and Avihu was therefore not simply the normal form of pain which we are familiar with, but a “pain” which can be defined as “pain” because it is a contraction of the self. This is exactly what happened at the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, who died through the “kiss of death” of Hashem. They became integrated (*miskalel*) in the Creator.

This happened specifically on the eighth day of the inauguration of the *Mishkan*, in line with the concept that we explained earlier. The first seven days of the *Mishkan*, in which there was *avodah* of Moshe, represents action. As long as there is action, there is a sense of self. Whenever a person is in a state of action, he cannot “contract” the self and expose his true inner dimension. When a person “contracts” into himself because he is in a state of action, he cannot access the Infinite

and instead he will experience his own existing self. In contrast to this, the eighth day of the *Mishkan* represents the removal of the self. It is precisely this removal of the self which Nadav and Avihu reached, which brought about their deaths.

## INTEGRATING WITH HASHEM IN PLACE, TIME AND SOUL

Moshe said to Aharon, “Aharon, my brother. I had known all along that the Temple would become sanctified through those who know the Creator” (*referring to the deaths of Nadav and Avihu*). How was it that Moshe could say “I had known all along”? Why should Moshe think that on this great day of rejoicing, a tragedy like this would occur at the very place of the celebration? And why would the deaths happen specifically to “those who know the Creator”?

It is based upon what we have explained until now. The eighth day of the *Mishkan* represents the point where there is a removal of the self, and an integration of the inner self with the Creator. It is a “contraction” in the sense of contracting the self, and entering into one’s innermost dimension [which is beyond the self, for it is the point of integration with the Creator]. Since there exists such a point in the soul, it follows that there must be an ability in a person to accept this integration.

[Everything is revealed in three dimensions - place, time, and soul.] In “place”, this concept of integrating with the Creator existed by the *Mishkan*. In “time”, it was manifest on *Rosh Chodesh Nissan*, the time when kings are anointed. In the “soul”, it is manifest in the concept of the “kiss of death” of Hashem, which is a form of integrating (*hiskalelus*) with the Creator. It can only be experienced by one who “knows the Creator” – such as the souls of Nadav and Avihu.

## “IN THE SHADOW OF YOUR WINGS, TAKE SHELTER”

The inner point of all of Hashem’s creations is when they become integrated (*miskalel*) with the Creator. The root of this matter, as explained here, is the concept of the *tzimtzum* (*constriction*), in which the Infinite, so to speak, contracts.

The *Mishkan* served as “testimony” to the world that the sin with the golden calf had been atoned for. The depth of this testimony is the verse, בצל כנפך יחסון “In the shadow of Your wings, take shelter”.<sup>2</sup> The

1 *Megillah* 10b2 *Tehillim* 36:8

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deep mission of each created being is to take shelter in the shadow of the “wings” of the Creator [so to speak].

A shadow, at first glance, seems to be nothing more than an absence [of light]. Why then must a person take shelter in the “shadow” of Hashem? Simply speaking, isn’t the *avodah* of a person, as explained in *sefarim hakedoshim*, to become attached to the light of the Infinite (*the ohr EinSof*)? Why does a person have the task to attach himself to the “shadow” of Hashem, which implies an absence of Hashem’s light?

But according to what we have explained here, the *avodah* of a person is to attach himself to the state of *tzimtzum*/contraction, a contraction of the self, which represents concept of “shadow”. On a more cosmic level, at first, the light of the Infinite filled all of the empty space of Creation, so to speak, and then Hashem made a contraction (*tzimtzum*) and removed some of His light. The removal of His light corresponds to the concept of “shadow”.

This is the deeper implication of “*In the shadow of Your wings, take shelter.*” When one attaches himself to a state of contraction of the self, the very opposite of expanding the self – this is the state of *hiskalelus* (*integration with Hashem*), and this is what it means to attach oneself to the state of “shadow”.

The Sages explain that Betzalel was called so because he was *b’tzeil Keil*, “in the shadow of G-d.”<sup>3</sup> This is the exact concept being described here. Betzalel was appointed to prepare and arrange everything in the *Mishkan*, because the *Mishkan* was the revelation of the “shadow” of Hashem [which corresponds to a removal of the self, enabling the soul to enter into a state of non-self and to thereby integrate with Hashem], which one must connect to.

## THE LIGHT OF THE BEGINNING SHINES WITHIN THE END

In the perspective of the current 6000 year era, we are an *eved* (*servant*) to Hashem, we have *avodah* to do, and we are in a period of action. But from the perspective of the light of the future, the light of *Moshiach*, where we will be above *bechirah* (*free will*), we will access the point that is above *avodah*.

The death of Moshe revealed a higher point of the *avodah* that he personified in his lifetime. Moshe’s title of “trustworthy servant” of Hashem represented his lower aspect, in which he had the *avodah* of being *Kohen Gadol* and serving on the *Mizbeiach* – the epitome of *avodah*.

But his refusal to serve on the eighth day of the *Mishkan* repre-

sented the point above *avodah*. It was an illumination of the spark of Moshe’s future, which is the “light of *Moshiach*” that is above the point of *avodah*.

This is also the root of *Moshiach*’s royal status of “*Melech HaMoshiach*”, (“*The King, the Messiah*”). *Rosh Chodesh Nissan* is the time of renewal for kings of the Jewish people, and the title of “king” mainly applies to *Moshiach*, whose royalty will be complete. This is the depth behind “In *Nissan* they were redeemed, and in *Nissan* they will be redeemed in the future” – since the month of *Nissan* is associated with kingship, it is also the root of *Melech HaMoshiach*.

*Rosh Chodesh Nissan* represents the point where there is no more *avodah*, which is the higher aspect of Moshe, when he refused to do *avodah* on the eighth day of the *Mishkan*. Until *Rosh Chodesh Nissan*, Moshe operated in the mode of *eved Hashem*, doing his respective *avodah*. From *Rosh Chodesh Nissan* onward, he ceased with *avodah* - for *Rosh Chodesh Nissan* contains the light of the King *Moshiach* - where there is no more *avodah*.

The root of this is in the concept that the *Mishkan* was not destroyed, and instead concealed. In terms of our own souls, this idea represents the light of the future when all the souls of the Jewish people will become concealed [nullified], and when all of the creations will become integrated with their Creator.

“The end is wrapped in the beginning”. The spiritual light of the *Mishkan* was the beginning of the settling of the *Shechinah* upon the world. The end of Creation will reflect this state as well, when the third *Beis HaMikdash* will descend from Heaven and it will never be destroyed. The first seven days of the *Mishkan*, where Moshe kept building and taking apart the *Mishkan*, represents the first two Temples which were destroyed. The eighth day of the *Mishkan*, when the *Mishkan* remained erect and it was not taken apart, is the root of the light of the third *Beis HaMikdash*, which will never be destroyed.

This concept, that the “light of the beginning” will shine amidst the end, will be manifest in the three areas of place, time, and soul. In “place”, it will be manifest with the structure of the third *Beis HaMikdash* which will never be destroyed. The “time” when this concept will be manifest is *Rosh Chodesh Nissan*, when *Moshiach* will reign as king. And in terms of “soul”, this concept will be revealed within all of the creations, when they will all “die” as Nadav and Avihu did, who were pulled after their Root of a desire to attach and integrate themselves with their Creator.

Then, it will be clearly revealed that there is *Ain Od Milvado*, “nothing besides for Him”. (*Bilvavi on the Parsha*)