

## Judge Righteously!

We are clearly commanded to judge with righteous judgment. This is good medicine for all including God's Leaders. In this week's *Torah Reading, Shemini*, Moses noted (See *Leviticus 10:16-20*) that a sin offering was not attended to properly (v. 16) and *snapped at [Aaron's priestly sons] Eleazar and Itamar* (v. 17). He is heard scolding them, in vv. 17-18, with: "You did not do, 'as I commanded.'" By way of response, Aaron steps in and says, in effect: **Ok. Technically, you are right. But consider that they did this just like I would have.** After Aaron takes up for them, Moses considers his argument and *backs off* his rebuke (v. 20). The back-and-forth between Moses and Aaron makes for quite an exchange, which requires some reflection. The Torah does not spare our teacher or our first *kohen hagadol* and instead give us details of their altercation based on their difference of opinion. Amazing!

Considering how Leviticus 10 began (Aaron's two other sons, Nadab and Abihu, invoke God's ire for not properly attending to the Tabernacle's particulars and are summarily executed) to me it is totally understandable that their father Aaron would be a bit edgy when his other two sons (who are novice *kohanim*, themselves) become the object of the boss' displeasure, in botching up a major sacrifice in the Sanctuary. By way of response, we hear Aaron immediately taking up for them to stave off further chagrin. I imagine Aaron is particularly mindful of the fatal consequences for his sons not adhering to proper *mishkan* protocol, given that the chapter opened with the lethal and painful reminder of what happens when one disregards the Almighty's instructions. Would you parents/dads not react in this same (or worse) way?

But we are commanded to judge the very way God judges – *Adonai* judges the *intentions of the heart*. Yes, Aaron was told (Lev. 9:15), to offer this offering with no mention of his sons assisting. While we must make room for delegation every now and then, *Aaron was principally responsible for the offering* – and thus for the impropriety noted by Moses. The Jewish commentator *Rashi* sheds light upon this incident by stating his opinion that Moses took on Aaron's sons (the subordinates) so as not to cast aspersions on Aaron and the dignity of the High Priest's office (by dealing with the subordinates sparing the person in charge). J. H. Hertz, states that against the backdrop of the deaths of Nadab and Abihu, "they [all] didn't deem themselves in a state of purity to share in the solemn rite" (Hertz, *Pentateuch & Haftorahs*, pp. 447-448). For Hertz brazen disregard is not the issue but rather it was an issue of the humility and the general feeling of unworthiness felt by Aaron and his sons. In short, with Nadab and Abihu's deaths still very fresh and the internalized pain very raw: "seeing themselves as sinners also, Eleazar and Itamar were reluctant to eat the sin offering." Regardless, wasn't this a mistake? Yes, it was. But the Anointed Leader (Moses) either was satisfied with the response or understood the beauty of letting the matter ride (v. 20) and he moved on.

The text evokes at least a couple of applications. First, the misconception that God is an angry God given to snapping out on everyone and throwing people into hell for *every infraction. Wrong!* This is simply not borne out by even a casual reading of the *Torah*. This is not how Jews see *Adonai*, and it's simply *not who He is! Adonai is gracious and compassionate!* Secondly, note that *motive is more important than action* (for example, you must prove motive in order to prosecute for murder). At the chapter's opening, the priests' mistake evolved out of indifference toward their priestly tasks (aided along by their being intoxicated while attending to divinely assigned tasks.) But at the chapter's close, the misstep is motivated by a very sober reverence – the Fear of the Lord. In this case then judgment is averted *because Adonai looks at the heart and not just at the fact that someone goofed in doing/not doing his or her part.*

This good news from the *Torah* is good news for us. Why, may you ask? *Yeshua* beckoned his followers to look deeply and to "24Do not judge by appearance, but judge righteously" (*John 7:24*). This, of course, agrees perfectly (surprised?) with the *Torah's* oft-stated requirements on looking into matters deeply, inquiring of particulars diligently and judging people and circumstances righteously. Such should we all do so in our affairs with others recalling how much our gracious God has done so in His assessments of us: "15I have given you an example – you should do for each other what I have done for you" (*John 13:15*). Anything I can do in comparison to what *Yeshua* did for me wanes...*Shabbat Shalom!*