

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	KETUVIM
Acharei Mot	4 May, 2019	29 Nisan 5779	Lev. 16:1-18:30	1Sam. 20:18-42	Matt. 15:10-20

This week's Torah portion '*acharei mot*' (אַחֲרֵי מוֹת) means 'after the death' of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:2). We will focus on their death today. Two sons died and yet it is a singular '*mot*' (death) in (Lev. 16:1), not '*mutu*' (מוֹתוֹ, deaths) (Lev. 10:2) in Hebrew. So, why does the Torah mention their deaths as one instead of two?

R' Chaim of Morocco said that the death of Nadab and Abihu is an eternal mystery. that is until the Moshiach (Messiah) returns. However, the Zohar explains that they were less than 20 years old as it is said, "the sons of Aharon." (v. 1) Meaning, they were not married and still lived under the roof of their father, Aharon. Here arises the contradiction since they were less than 20 years old, they were not considered as an adult. Therefore, they did not deserve death. So, how could the Torah contradict itself and causes their death?

The Gemara explains that even though Nadab and Abihu were less than 20 years old, they were very intelligent and clever. Thus, they were treated as an adult and deserved the treatment of an adult. The Gemara gives example of Sh'muel (Samuel). When Sh'muel was living with Eli, he was two years old. Yet Sh'muel was able to hear the voice of Hashem. (1Sam. Ch. 3) Even though he was young, he was able to distinguish from good and evil. Meaning that he was extremely intelligent. Thus, he was considered righteous and if he did something wrong, he would be punished as an adult. Therefore, there is no contradiction in the Torah.

We just finished counting of the Omer for the second week which is *Gevurah* (severity, judgment). The five attributes (*chesed, gevurah, tiferet, netzach, hod*) channels through *Yesod* (foundation, connection). The gifts/talents given by Hashem then comes through *Malkut* (creation, accomplishment, realization of the Divine plan) to share such gifts/talents with others. If a person does not share the talents given by Hashem, then that person is punished for not doing so. If a person does right by sharing the talents, then that bill is erased. We learned that the Torah is measure for measure. Such is the case here.

When Hashem created this world, He created with strict truth. Thus, the Torah begins with "*B'eresheet bara Elokim et hashamayim ve'et ha'aretz*" (In the beginning Elokim created the heaven and the earth.) The truth has no distortion. It knows only the absolute judgment. Thus, Elokim created *Chesed* (mercy, loving-kindness) by revealing His Name, YHVH later in the Torah.

The spiritual essence of the righteous are so high, and the punishment for their misdeeds are also very high. We learned that Yosef (Joseph) spent additional two years for depending on the Cup-bearer to rescue him from prison (Gen. 40:14). His life was also shortened for five years for not revealing himself to his brothers when Yehudah (Judah) said "your servant my father" meaning Ya'akov (Jacob) (Gen. 44:24). Does this mean our spiritual should remain same or lower? Heaven forbids. Our spiritual essence has to grow closer to Hashem.

Have you ever wondered why Mitzrayim (Egypt) was so severely punished by Hashem? Let's review what happened prior to the Plagues. Before the Plagues, the children of Yisrael lived in the land of Goshen. After a while, they began to spread all over Mitzrayim as said, "and the land was filled with them" (Exo. 1:7). The Pharaoh was concerned because he now has 'a nation' growing inside his country and they could turn against Mitzrayim. So, the Pharaoh had all the rights to defend his country. He summoned his three advisors,

Bilaam, Yitro (Jetro), and Yyov (Job) on how he should deal with this threat. He also called upon the midwives, Shiprah and Pu'ah and commanded them to kill male babies. Of course, they did not do so. Because they knew that if there were other midwives, the chances of male babies being killed is greater. Thus, they risked their lives by staying as midwives to save the babies.

Now, Hashem hates an ungrateful people or nations. When the children of Yisrael lived in Goshen under the protection of the Pharaoh, Mitzrayim became the most powerful nation in the world. Pharaoh could have passed a new law saying that the children of Yisrael are to return to Goshen and live there. But Pharaoh did not do that. It showed the Pharaoh was ungrateful for the mercy shown to them by Hashem. Second, they (Pharaoh and Bilaam) enjoyed their deeds of killing male babies. In other words, they did not show mercy to the helpless. Lastly, Hashem has not yet decided on His decree (Gen. 15:13) on how to punish the nation who will afflict the children of Yisrael.

Returning to our verse, it is said in Yyov (Job) 36:32-33, “He has covered His hands with lightening, and commands it to strike. Its noise declares concerning Him, also the cattle, as to what is coming up.” The sages teach that this is the prophecy concerning Nadab and Abihu when they brought “strange fire” to Hashem. (Lev. 10:1)

Chazal¹ said that Nadab said to Abihu, “When these two people would die?” These two people refers to Moshe and Aharon. Thus, they were killed when they brought incense to Hashem. Abihu did not say anything, yet why did he receive same punishment as Nadab? Chazal said that when a *rasha* (wicked person) says *lashon hara* (slander), the listener is agreeing with a *rasha* by not saying anything. Thus, Abihu is 100% guilty of *lashon hara*. Therefore, a fire came forth from Hashem and entered their nostrils, killing them instantly from the inside. (Lev. 10:2)

How does this *lashon hara* apply today? We see that in news which talks about this and that about a person whether it is truth or not. There also are a lot of gossip programs that talks about rumors. The Torah forbids *lashon hara* even if a person has a direct knowledge of some events. For example, let us say a new neighbor who is a convicted child molester moves in to your neighborhood. You can warn your neighbors about him and the reason to avoid him since his conviction is a public record. However, you are not allowed to say, “I also heard he abuses his wife” as this is a rumor without personal verifiable knowledge. Yeshua said, “For our heart comes forth wicked reasoning, murders, adulteries, whorings, thefts, false witnessing, slanders. These defile the man.” (Matt. 15:19-20) So, don’t be surprised when Hashem opens the Book of Deeds and He shows you lists of thousands or millions of *lashon hara*.

We now come to the original question of since Nadab and Abihu died, the proper word should be ‘*mutu*’ (deaths) in plural instead of singular ‘*mot*’ (מוֹת, death). Because, not all death is same. For example, during the WW II, many Jews died in the gas chamber. Even though, they died on the same day and time, not all deaths are equal as their death may be shorter or longer before final *ruach* (soul) leaves the body. On the scale of Hashem, everything is precise. A person may have taken less toxic gas than the other person before his death. For this reason, not all deaths are exact. Thus, Nadab and Abihu died not of punishment but from reality by the consequences of choice they made. Meaning, they were ignorant that bringing a “strange fire” to Hashem would cause their death.

¹ All Jewish sages of the Mishna, Tosefta and Talmud era, 250 BCE – 625 CE