



RABBI GROSSMAN ON THE WEEKLY PARSHA



After the Death of the Sons of Aharon Parshas Acharei Mos – Kedoshim

During my last visit to the US, I drove to Long Island as I usually do, and met with my dear friends Rabbi Yoel Kaplan, the head of a yeshiva for youngsters, and his wife Rebbitzin Leah. As always, I was delighted to meet with them.

I have known the Kaplan family for many years. I merited serving as their match maker. They told me - you took care of us, now you need to take care of our daughter.

Elisheva was a very special girl who had wonderful traits, and whose parents knew they could find an excellent shidduch for her; she herself was looking for someone who would immerse himself in Torah. This is what she saw in her father's home, and this how she planned to live the rest of her life.

I blessed her with all my heart that her wishes and prayers would come true and she would merit to establish a home on the foundations of Torah, just like her parents' home. And indeed, Elisheva did merit to be engaged to Yisroel Levine, one of the leading students at the Mir Yeshiva in Jerusalem.

Nothing prepared me for the bitter news I received during the Pesach holiday. Elisheva and her groom Yisroel were killed in a horrific car accident.

I was stunned. Why this tragedy happened - we shall not know, but the prophet tells us "In vain have I smitten your children, they received no correction."¹ We must learn a lesson from this tragedy.

I called the dear Kaplan family and could not find the words to console them. "The bride's gown is already prepared, the mother wept. "How much she looked forward to the wedding," her father added. The entire Jewish community in the US was mourning with them.

I spoke to their hearts and told them that the Heavens seek such sacrifices, unblemished and pure. "I will be sanctified through those near to Me,"² G-d said of the deaths of Nadav and Avihu the sons of Aharon the Kohen, and as King David said "precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of His pious ones."³

But I added, you must know, that the time of the sacrifice is immense in the Heavens, and as one who had brought a sacrifice in the Temple would have prayed for himself, so too you now have the opportunity to pray for yourselves, for your families and for the entire Jewish people who are in pain with you.

The family then told me that father of the groom, Rabbi Yeshayahu Levine, shared similar ideas during the funeral.

In his eulogy he described the last Seder they celebrated only days before. He borrowed from the notions of the Afikoman, a piece of Matzah the children hide and guard, and then return to their father at the conclusion of the Seder, in return for a gift.

Only if the children return the Afikoman unharmed does the deal go through.

"Father in Heaven," the groom's father said, "we have safeguarded your Matzah clean and pure for two decades. We have safeguarded your bride and groom, we have safeguarded your deposit with purity and holiness, and now at the end of the Seder you have requested it back, but we too have a request – we want a gift in return."

Everyone fell silent, wondering what the father would ask for, and then he read off a checklist - tens of thousands of matches for those who have not found theirs, tens of thousands of cures for those who need them, and tens of thousands of miracles for those who require them.

In our weekly Parsha we read about the death of Nadav and Avihu, "after the death of Aaron's two sons, when they drew near before the Lord, and they died."⁴

Aharon's response is astounding - he remains silent. What kept Aaron silent during these horrific moments? In the midrash we learn that G-d eulogized the two sons and "when G-d speaks, everyone remains silent."⁵

A study of the verses teaches us another lesson. Right after the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, Aharon did not know if his other two sons would die as well. However, Moshe provided the answer – "And Moshe spoke to Aharon and his surviving sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, "Take the meal offering that is left over from the Lord's fire offerings and eat it as unleavened loaves beside the altar."

Hearing these words, Aharon knew that his sons were spared, and that the sin was atoned with the death of his first two sons. Therefore, he remained silent as he had just received a gift of the lives of his two remaining sons, who will continue the Kohanic dynasty for generations to come. He had received what he could from this tragedy.

The Heavens do not close all the doors to a person. When one door is shut, another is immediately open. Facing the pain of the death of the children, gifts come from Heaven.

¹ Yermiyahu 2:30.

² Vayikra 10:3.

³ Tehillim 116:16.

⁴ Vayikra 16:1.

⁵ Sifri Bamidbar 58.