

ויקרא רבה (וילנא) פרשה יב

"יין ושכר אל תשת" –

הה"ד (משלי כג) "אל תרא יין כי יתאדם כי יתן בכיס [בכוס] עינו יתהלך במישרים: אחריתו כנחש ישך וכצפעני יפרש [יפריש]" . . .

מה צפעון זה מפריש בין מיתה לחיים, כך הפריש היין בין אהרן ובניו למיתה,

דתני רבי שמעון: לא מתו בניו של אהרן אלא על שנכנסו שתויי יין לאהל מועד.

רבי פנחס בשם ר' לוי אמר:

משל למלך שהיה לו בן בית נאמן.

מצאו עומד על פתח חניות, והתיז את ראשו בשתיקה, ומינה בן בית אחר תחתיו,

ואין אנו יודעים מפני מה הרג את הראשון,

אלא ממה שמצוה את השני ואמר 'לא תכנס בפתח חניות',

אנו יודעין שמתוך כך הרג הראשון.

כך (ויקרא ט) "ותצא אש מלפני ה' ותאכל אותם" –

ואין אנו יודעים מפני מה מתו,

אלא ממה שמצוה את אהרן ואמר לו (שם/ויקרא/י) "יין ושכר אל תשת",

אנו יודעין מתוך כך שלא מתו אלא מפני היין.

Vayikra Rabbah (Vilna) 12

“Wine that intoxicates you must not drink” –

This is parallel to “and its aftermath bites like a snake, and like a scorpion *yafrish*” . . .

Just as the scorpion separates between death and life, so too wine separated between

Aharon and his sons for death,

as Rabbi Shimon taught: “The sons of Aharon died because they entered the Tent of Appointment having drunk wine”.

Rabbi Pinchas in the name of R. Levi said:

A parable: To a king who had a trusted house-retainer.

He found him standing at the entrance to the stores, and silently beheaded

him, and appointed another house-retainer in his stead,

and we would not know why he killed the first,

except that he commands the second, saying “Do not enter into the entrance to the stores”,

so we know that this was why he killed the first.

So “A fire emerged from before Hashem and consumed them” –

We would not know why they died,

But from His commanding Aharon, saying “Wine that intoxicates you must not drink”,

We know that they died because of wine.

What is the purpose of a *mashal* (usually translated parable)?

One possibility, used by the Rabbi to explain the Biblical works attributed to King Solomon, is that the *mashal* makes the inaccessible accessible, perhaps by taking something removed from our experience and relating it to something within our experience; thus, for example, G-d's love for the Jews is analogous to that of a father for his children.

Sometimes, however, a *mashal* may have the opposite effect; it reveals the strange in what previously seemed accessible or commonplace. Thus a behavior which seemed within the standard range of Divine action suddenly seems strange when we consider that a human being would not have acted that way.

Now most rabbinic *meshalim* involve a king¹, and it is not clear to me that royal behavior was within the experience of most Rabbis or their constituents. Therefore, a one-to-one replacement of king for G-d is not terribly helpful in making behavior explicable, and we should be alive to the second possibility when reading them. (My thanks are due here to Jeff Spitzer; among the many things I have learned from him is the need to pay attention to the gaps between the *mashal* and the *nimshal*, more so than the similarities.)

The *mashal* in the attached text sets up the following analogy: The deaths of Nadav and Avihu, followed by the command to Aharon to avoid entering the Ohel Moed after drinking wine, are like a king who silently beheads a trusted house-retainer after finding him "standing at the entrance to the stores"², then appoints a replacement and tells him "do not enter into the entrance to the stores". Just as we would conclude that the first retainer was beheaded for entering into the entrance to stores, here too we conclude that Nadav and Avihu were consumed by Divine fire because they entered the Ohel Moed after drinking wine.

Here are a number of puzzling points:

- 1) The *mashal* does not explain in any way *why* the king was silent.
- 2) The *mashal* does not explain why a trusted³ servant disobeys.
- 3) Why is the analogy drawn to a house-retainer who enters where he should not have, rather than to a house-retainer who enters *drunk* where he should not have?
- 4) Why is it necessary for the house-retainer to be "trusted"?
- 5) Why must the king appoint a replacement, rather than give instructions to other, remaining house-retainers?

It may be possible to answer all these questions by figuring out exactly what the house-retainer has done wrong, and why he disobeys – I welcome suggestions, as I have thus far failed to do so. But it seems to me regardless that the *mashal* calls attention to G-d's failure to state directly why Nadav and Avihu died, rather than explaining it away.

Here are two tentative suggestions as to why the king is silent:

- a) He is so shocked/betrayed that he cannot speak.
- b) He does not wish to harm the reputation of the dead courtier.

Do either of these seem to explain G-d's silence in our context well?

One last, possibly far-fetched note: The conclusion is that Nadav and Avihu died "as the result of the wine", which does not necessarily mean that drinking wine was their offence – rather, it may be that alcohol enabled or encouraged them to do something wrong. Furthermore – this is a point I hope to develop at length elsewhere, but may be especially appropriate in the week after Purim – Nadav and Avihu may not have been drinking wine *despite* the upcoming inauguration, or even to get their courage up, but rather *because* they believed that ecstasy was necessary for Divine service, even if it can only be obtained through external chemical means. They were, it seems, mistaken.

Shabbat shalom

Aryeh Klapper

¹ See on this the work of David Stern – I am travelling and can't cite the book's title from memory

² Note that Esther Rabbah has "entrance to the house"; I can't figure out with either text exactly what the offense here was.

³ Note that *ne'eman* could easily be translated faithful, which would strengthen this question.