



The Story of Nadav and Avihu throughout Tanakh:

I. The Story of Nadav and Avihu:

<p><u>1. Vayikra 10</u></p> <p>(1) And Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon, took each of them his censer, and put fire in it, and put incense on it, <u>and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded them not.</u> (2) <u>And a fire went out from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.</u> (3) <u>Then Moshe said to Aharon, This is it that which the Lord spoke, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come near me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aharon held his peace.</u> (4) And Moshe called Mishael and Elzafan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aharon, and said to them, Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp. (5) So they went near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp; as Moshe had said. (6) <u>And Moshe said to Aharon, and to El'azar and to Itamar, his sons, Let the hair of your heads not grow long, neither rend your clothes; lest you die, and lest anger come upon all the people: but let your brethren, the whole house of Yisrael bewail the burning which the Lord has kindled.</u> (7) And you shall not go out from the door of the Tent of Meeting lest you die: for the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you. And they did according to the word of Moshe.</p>	<p><u>1. ויקרא פרק י</u></p> <p>(א) <u>וַיִּקְחוּ בְנֵי אֶהֱרֹן נָדָב וַאֲבִיהוּא אִישׁ מִחֶתְתּוֹ וַיִּתְּנוּ בָהֶן אֵשׁ וַיִּשְׂמוּ עָלֶיהָ קֹטֶרֶת וַיִּקְרְבוּ לִפְנֵי יְקֹוֹק אֵשׁ זָרָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוָּה אֹתָם:</u> (ב) <u>וַתֵּצֵא אֵשׁ מִלִּפְנֵי יְקֹוֹק וַתֹּאכַל אוֹתָם וַיָּמָתוּ לִפְנֵי יְקֹוֹק:</u> (ג) <u>וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל אֶהֱרֹן הוּא אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְקֹוֹק לֵאמֹר בְּקִרְבִּי אֲקַדֵּשׁ וְעַל פְּנֵי כָל הָעָם אֲכַבֵּד וַיִּדַם אֶהֱרֹן:</u> (ד) <u>וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶל מִישָׁאֵל וְאֶל אֶלְצָפָן בְּנֵי עֲזִיָּאֵל דָּד אֶהֱרֹן וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם קִרְבוּ שָׂאוּ אֶת אֲחֵיכֶם מֵאֵת פְּנֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ אֶל מַחוּץ לַמִּחֲנֶה:</u> (ה) <u>וַיִּקְרְבוּ וַיִּשְׂאֹם בְּכַתְּנֹתָם אֶל מַחוּץ לַמִּחֲנֶה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה:</u> (ו) <u>וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל אֶהֱרֹן וְלֵאלֶעָזָר וְלֵאִיתָמָר בְּנֵי רֵאשִׁיכֶם אַל תִּפְרְעוּ וּבְגְדֵיכֶם לֹא תִפְרְמוּ וְלֹא תִמָּתוּ וְעַל כָּל הָעֵדָה יִקְצַף וְאֲחֵיכֶם כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל יִכְפוּ אֶת הַשֵּׁרֶפֶת אֲשֶׁר שָׂרַף יְקֹוֹק:</u> (ז) <u>וּמִפְתַּח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לֹא תֵצְאוּ פֶן תָּמָתוּ כִּי שֶׁמֶן מִשְׁחַת יְקֹוֹק עָלֵיכֶם וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כַּדְבַר מֹשֶׁה:</u></p>
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II. What was the sin?

A. Drunkenness/Inappropriate Behavior

<p><u>2. Rashi Vayikra 10</u></p> <p>Rebbi Yishmael says: <u>they entered the sanctuary intoxicated.</u> Know this as <u>after their death, the remaining sons were</u></p>	<p><u>2. רש"י ויקרא פרק י</u></p> <p>רבי ישמעאל אומר שתויי יין נכנסו למקדש, תדע שאחר מיתתן הזהיר הנותרים שלא יכנסו שתויי יין למקדש.</p>
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<p><u>warned to not enter the sanctuary when drunk.</u></p>	
<p>3. Vayikra 10 (8) And the Lord spoke to Aharon, saying, (9) Do not drink wine or strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when you enter the Tent of Meeting, lest you die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations:</p>	<p>3. ויקרא פרק י (ח) וַיְדַבֵּר יְקֹנֵק אֶל אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר: (ט) יִין וְשִׁכָר אֶל תִּשְׁתֵּה אֹתָהּ וּבְנֵיךָ אִתְּךָ בְּבֹאֲכֶם אֶל אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְלֹא תִמְתּוּ חֻקַּת עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם:</p>

B. Misdirected Actions/Hubris

<p>4. Sifra, Shmini, Mekhilta d' Miluim, 2:32 "And the sons of Aaron took: <u>They too were bound up in the joy of the occasion. When they saw the "new" fire (from G-d) they acted to add love to love.</u>"</p>	<p>4. ספרא, שמיני, מכילתא דמילואים ב ל"ב [לב] "ויקחו בני אהרן" – אף הם בשמחתם. כיון שראו אש חדשה עמדו להוסיף אהבה על אהבה.</p>
<p>5. Rav Hirsch: Vayikra 10:1 ...all offerings are formulae of the demands of G-d... <u>self devised offerings would be a killing of those very truths which our offerings are meant to impress and dominate the bringers and would be placing a pedestal on which to glorify one's own ideas... not by fresh inventions even of G-d serving novices but by carrying out that which is ordained by G-d</u> has the Jewish priest to establish the authenticity of his activities...</p>	
<p>6. Vayikra 8 (36) So Aharon and his sons did all the things <u>which the Lord had commanded by the hand of Moshe.</u></p> <p>Vayikra 9 (21) and the breasts and the right shoulder Aharon waved for a wave offering before the Lord; <u>as Moshe commanded.</u></p>	<p>6. ויקרא פרק ח (לו) וַיַּעַשׂ אַהֲרֹן וּבָנָיו אֶת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּהוּ ה' בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה</p> <p>ויקרא פרק ט (כא) וְאֵת הַחֻזוֹת וְאֵת שׁוֹק הַיְמִינִי הִגִּיף אַהֲרֹן תְּנוּפָה לִפְנֵי ה' כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה מֹשֶׁה</p>
<p>7. Talmud Bavli, Eruvin 63a Rabbi Eliezer says: <u>The sons of Aaron died only because they issued a halakhic ruling before Moses, their teacher.</u> What did they expound in support of their conclusion that they must bring fire inside as opposed to waiting for fire to come down from the heavens? It is stated in the Torah: "And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar, and lay the wood in order on the fire" (Leviticus 1:7), which led them to say: Although fire</p>	<p>7. גמרא עירובין סג. והא תניא רבי אליעזר אומר לא מתו בני אהרן עד שהורו הלכה בפני משה רבן מאי דרוש ונתנו בני אהרן הכהן אש על המזבח אמרו אף על פי שהאש יורדת מן השמים מצוה להביא מן ההדיוט</p>

descends from Heaven, it is nonetheless a mitzva to bring ordinary fire.

C. Unchecked Religious Passion/Overfamiliarity with קדושה

8. Shemot 24

(9) Then Moshe went up, and Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, and seventy of the elders of Yisrael:

(10) and they saw the God of Yisrael: and there was under his feet a kind of paved work of sapphire stone, and as it were the very heaven for clearness.

(11) And upon the nobles of the children of Yisrael he laid not his hand: and they beheld God, and did eat and drink.

8. שמות פרק כד

(ט) ויעל משה ואהרן נדב ואביהוא ושבעים מזקני ישראל:

(י) ויראו את אלהי ישראל ותחת רגליו כמעשה לבנת הספיר וכעצם השמים לטהר:

(יא) ואל אצילי בני ישראל לא שלח ידו ויחזו את האלהים ויאכלו וישתו:

III. The Story of David and Uzzah

9. Shmuel Bet 6

(1) Again, David gathered together all the chosen men of Yisrael, thirty thousand.

(2) And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baaleh-Yehuda, to bring up from there the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the Lord of hosts who dwells upon the keruvim.

(3) And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Avinadav who was in Giva: and Uzzah and Achio, the sons of Avinadav, drove the new cart.

(4) And they brought it out of the house of Avinadav which was at Giva, accompanying the ark of God: and Achio went before the ark.

(5) And David and all the house of Yisrael played before the Lord on all manner of instruments made of cypress wood, on lyres, and on lutes, and on timbrels, and on rattles, and on cymbals.

(6) And when they came to Nakhon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it.

(7) And the anger of the Lord burned against Uzzah; and G-d smote him there

9. שמואל ב פרק ו

(א) ויסף עוד דוד את כל בחור בישראל שלשים אלה:

(ב) ויקם וילך דוד וכל העם אשר אתו מבעלי יהודה להעלות משם את ארון האלקים אשר נקרא שם שם יקנו צבאות ישב הכרבים עליו:

(ג) וירכבו את ארון האלקים אל עגלה חדשה וישאאו מבית אבינדב אשר בגבעה ועזא ואחיו בני אבינדב נהגים את העגלה חדשה:

(ד) וישאאו מבית אבינדב אשר בגבעה עם ארון האלקים ואחיו הלך לפני הארון:

(ה) ודוד וכל בית ישראל משחקים לפני יקנו בכל עצי ברזים ובכנרות ובנבלים ובתפים ובמנענעים ובצלצלים:

(ו) ויבאו עד גרן נכון וישלח עזא אל ארון האלקים ויאחז בו כי שמטו הבקר:

(ז) ויחר אף יקנו בעזה ויפהו שם האלקים על השל וימת שם עם ארון האלקים:

(ח) ויחר לדוד על אשר פרץ יקנו פרץ בעזה ויקרא למקום ההוא פרץ עזה עד היום הנה:

(ט) וירא דוד את יקנו ביום ההוא ויאמר איך יבוא אלי ארון יקנו:

(י) ולא אבה דוד להסיר אליו את ארון יקנו על עיר דוד ויטהו דוד בית עבד אדום הגת:

<p><u>for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.</u> (8) <u>And David was displeased</u>, because the Lord had burst out against Uzza: <u>and he called the name of the place Peretz-Uzzah to this day.</u> (9) And David was afraid of the Lord that day, and said, How shall the ark of the Lord come to me? (10) So David would not remove the ark of the Lord to him into the city of David: but David carried it aside into the house of Oved-Edom the Gitti.</p>	
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10. Similarities	Differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time of celebration and close proximity of Divine presence (<i>Mikdash</i> and <i>Aron HaBrit</i>) • Celebration turned to mourning by death of person/priest • Unclear what the person did wrong • Person struck down when approaching or touching something קודש • Names: נדב ואביהוא, sons of אבינדב 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reactions of Aharon and David: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Aharon is silent - וידם אהרן ○ David is upset - ויחר לְדָוִד, names the place after Uzzah, makes changes before he moves <i>Aron HaBrit</i> again.

<p>11. Divrei HaYamim 1, 15 (11) And David called for Zadoq and Evyatar the priests, and for the Levites, for Uriel, Asaya, and Yoel, Shemaya, and Eliel, and Amminadav, (12) and he said to them, You are the chiefs of the fathers' houses of the Levites: sanctify yourselves, you and your brethren, that you may bring up the ark of the Lord God of Yisrael to the place that I have prepared for it. (13) <u>For because you did not do so at first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, because we did not seek him according to the prescribed form.</u> (14) So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord God of Yisrael. (15) <u>And the children of the Levites bore the ark of God upon their shoulders the bars</u></p>	<p>11. דברי הימים א פרק טו (יא) וַיִּקְרָא דָוִד לְצָדוֹק וְלֵאֲבִיָּתָר הַכֹּהֲנִים וְלְלוֹיִם לְאֹרִיֵאל עֲשֵׂיָה וְיוֹאֵל שְׁמַעְיָה וְאַלְיָאֵל וְעַמִּינָדָב: (יב) וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אַתֶּם רְאֵשֵׁי הָאָבוֹת לְלוֹיִם הַתְּקַדְּשׁוּ אַתֶּם וְאַחֲיֵיכֶם וְהַעֲלִיתֶם אֶת אֲרוֹן יְקֹוֹק אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל הַכִּינּוֹתַי לוֹ: (יג) כִּי לְמַפְרָאשׁוֹנָה לֹא אַתֶּם פָּרַצְתֶּם יְקֹוֹק אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּנוֹ כִּי לֹא דָרַשְׁנָהוּ כַּמִּשְׁפָּט: (יד) וַיִּתְקַדְּשׁוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים וְהַלְוִיִּם לְהַעֲלוֹת אֶת אֲרוֹן יְקֹוֹק אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: (טו) וַיִּשָּׂאוּ בְנֵי הַלְוִיִּם אֶת אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה מֹשֶׁה כַּדָּבָר יְקֹוֹק בְּכַתְּפָם בְּמַטּוֹת עֲלֵיהֶם:</p>
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<p><u>being upon them, as Moshe had commanded according to the word of the Lord.</u></p>	
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<p>12. Shmuel Bet, 6 (12) And it was told to king David, saying, The Lord has blessed the house of Oved-Edom, and all that he has, because of the ark of God. So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Oved-Edom into the city of David with gladness. (13) <u>And when they that bore the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling.</u> (14) And David leaped about before the Lord with all his might; and David was girded with a linen efod. (15) <u>So David and all the house of Yisrael brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the shofar.</u></p>	<p>12. שמואל ב, ו</p> <p>(12) וַיִּגַד לְמִלְכָּה דָּוִד לֵאמֹר בְּרַךְ ה' אֶת־בַּיִת עֲבָד אָדָם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ בְּעִבּוֹר אַרְוֹן הַאֱלֹקִים וַיִּלְכֹּד דָּוִד וַיַּעַל אֶת־אַרְוֹן הַאֱלֹקִים מִבַּיִת עֲבָד אָדָם עִיר דָּוִד בְּשִׂמְחָה</p> <p>(13) וַיְהִי כִּי צָעְדוּ נְשָׂאֵי אַרְוֹן־ה' שֵׁשָׁה צְעָדִים וַיִּזְבַּח שׁוֹר וּמְרִיא</p> <p>(14) וַדָּוִד מְכַרְכֵּר בְּכָל־עֹז לִפְנֵי ה' וַדָּוִד הִגִּיר אֵפוֹד בָּד</p> <p>(15) וַדָּוִד וְכָל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעַלִּים אֶת־אַרְוֹן ה' בַּתְּרוּעָה וּבִקּוֹל שׁוֹפָר</p>
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13. Rabbi Alex Israel, Parshat Shemini, Death in the Sanctuary
<https://www.alexisrael.org/sheminni---death-in-the-sanctuary>

In our generation we have also experienced tragedy, six million of the Holiest of the Holy, six million Uzza's, Nadav's and Avihu's, being burnt, being struck down.

The two responses that we have read – that of David and that of Aharon – should serve as worthy paradigms in our thinking about the Holocaust. On the one hand, silence should pervade in our response to the overwhelming tragedy of the Shoah. Silence, due simply to our incapability to even grasp the enormity of the suffering, cruelty, and loss that is the Shoah. And silence, because we are in pain that is so deep, that we have no words. And then silence again, for who can understand how the Ribbono shel Olam, who is in governance of our world, might let any people, yet still His people, who bear His name, how could God allow them to suffer such pain, humiliation, such death and destruction, such torture and violation? Words cannot give any comprehension. And so, we mourn the loss, we do not comprehend. We are silent.

And yet, David throws us in another, very different direction. David Hamelech says, Let us rebuild, let us continue to stride upon that Royal path to bring God's name to Jerusalem. Let us tenaciously continue, despite the inexplicable death, let us rise above it, and carry our Torah shoulder high, with a fanfare, to Yerushalayim. The rebuilding of our Torah, our nation and land is also a worthy response to the Holocaust. That is David's response. Action, persistence, soul-searching, rebuilding.

IV. The Yom Kippur Avodah

<p>14. Leviticus 16</p> <p>(1) ה' spoke to Moses <u>after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they drew too close to the presence of ה' (2)</u> ה' said to Moses: Tell your brother Aaron that <u>he is not to come at will into the Shrine behind the curtain, in front of the cover that is upon the ark, lest he die</u>; for I appear in the cloud over the cover. (3) Thus only shall Aaron enter the Shrine: with a bull of the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering...</p> <p>(12) and he shall take a panful of glowing coals scooped from the altar before ה', and two handfuls of finely ground aromatic incense, and bring this behind the curtain.</p> <p>(13) <u>He shall put the incense on the fire before ה'</u>, so that the cloud from the incense screens the cover that is over [the Ark of] the Pact, lest he die.</p>	<p>14. ויקרא טז</p> <p>(א) וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אַחֲרֵי מוֹת שְׁנֵי בָנֵי אַהֲרֹן בְּקִרְבָּתָם לִפְנֵי־ה' וַיִּמְתּוּ: (ב) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה דַּבֵּר אֶל־אַהֲרֹן אַחִיךָ וְאַל־יבֹא בְּכַל־עֵת אֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ מִבַּיִת לְפָרֶכֶת אֶל־פְּנֵי הַכַּפֹּרֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאֹרֹן וְלֹא יָמוּת כִּי בָעֵינִי אֲרֹאֶה עַל־הַכַּפֹּרֶת: (ג) בְּזָאת יָבֹא אַהֲרֹן אֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ בְּפָר בְּוֶבֶקֶר לְחֻטָּאת וְאַיִל לְעֹלָה:</p> <p>(יב) וְלָקַח מְלֵאֵי הַמִּחְתָּה גִּחְלֵי־אֵשׁ מֵעַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ מִלִּפְנֵי ה' וּמְלֵא חֲפָנָיו קִטְרֹת סַמִּים דָּקָה וְהֵבִיא מִגִּיֵּת לְפָרֶכֶת: (יג) וּנְתַן אֶת־הַקִּטְרֹת עַל־הָאֵשׁ לִפְנֵי ה' וְכִסָּהּ וְעָנַן הַקִּטְרֹת אֶת־הַכַּפֹּרֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָעֲדוּת וְלֹא יָמוּת:</p>
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15. Outline of the first half of the book of Vayikra	
9-10	The 8th day of the dedication ceremony for the Mishkan The sin of Nadav and Avihu
11	Forbidden foods and the impurity associated with them
12	Impurity of a woman who has given birth
13-14	Tzarat (skin eruptions) of people, clothes, and houses
15	Impurity of a zav (irregular flow), someone with a seminal emission, <i>niddah</i> (menstruating woman), <i>zavah</i> (women with an irregular flow)
16	The Yom Kippur service

<p>16. Rabbi Yair Kahn, “The Death of Aaron's Sons, and the Priestly Service on Yom Kippur”, VBM</p> <p>... <u>From the beginning of Vayikra up until the revelation of the Shekhina on the eighth day, the Torah addresses only one aspect of religious experience – the possibility of coming close to God.</u> Suddenly, at the moment of climax, when fire emerges from before God and consumes whatever is upon the altar before the eyes of the nation, there is a disruption: Aharon's sons enter the Kodesh with no Divine command, and they are immediately consumed. In the blink of an eye, everything changes...<u>In this context, the parashiot relating to the various types of ritual impurity come to emphasize the other</u></p>

aspect of religious experience, and to teach us about the infinite abyss that separates between human reality and Divine reality. Impurity is an inseparable part of ultimate human reality. It accompanies his birth, as well as his death; it is bound up with his eating and his marital relations. Mortal man, mired in impurity, cannot come to God without the laws of purification that God Himself commands...

V. The Story of Korach and the 250 leaders:

17. Bamidbar 16:

(16) And Moses said to Korah, “Tomorrow, you and all your company appear before ה', you and they and Aaron. (17) Each of you take your fire pan and lay incense on it, and each of you bring that fire pan before ה', two hundred and fifty fire pans; you and Aaron also [bring] your fire pans.” (18) They each took their fire pan, put fire in it, laid incense on it, and took a place at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, as did Moses and Aaron. (19) Korah gathered the whole community against them at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. Then the Presence of ה' appeared to the whole community, (20) and ה' spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, (21) “Stand back from this community that I may annihilate them in an instant!” (22) But they fell on their faces and said, “O God, of the breath of all flesh! When one member sins, will You be wrathful with the whole community?”

(35) And a fire went forth from ה' and consumed the two hundred and fifty contestants offering the incense.

17. במדבר טז

(טז) ויאמר משה אל-קרח אפה וכל-עדתו היו לפני ה' אפה ונתם ואהרן מקור: (יז) וקחו איש מחתתו ונתתם עליהם קטרת והקרבתם לפני ה' איש מחתתו חמשים ומאתים מחתת ואפה ואהרן איש מחתתו: (יח) ויקחו איש מחתתו ויתנו עליהם אש וישימו עליהם קטרת ויעמדו פתח אהל מועד ומשה ואהרן: (יט) ויקהל עליהם קרח את-כל-העדה אל-פתח אהל מועד וקרא כבוד-ה' אל-כל-העדה: (כ) וידבר ה' אל-משה ואל-אהרן לאמר: (כא) הבלו מתוך העדה הנאת ואכלה אתם קרנע: (כב) ויפלו על-פניהם ויאמרו אל אלקי הרוחת לכל-בשר האיש אחז יחטא ועל כל-העדה תקצר:

(לה) ואש יצאה מאת ה' ותאכל את החמשים ומאתים איש מקריבי הקטרת:

18. Similarities	Differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In both stories, it describes them as putting incense in their firepans: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ איש מחתתו, ויתנו בהן אש, וישימו עליה קטרת ● In both stories, it uses the line of “ועל כל-העדה תקצר”, “should G-d get angry at the whole nation” ● Fire comes down from heaven, killing both groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Nadav and Avidu choose to offer kitorot, while the 250 leaders are commanded to by Moshe.

19. Rav Amnon Bazak, Starting Point, Parshat Korach:

In both cases, one might say that the sinners acted out of positive motivation. They wished to participate in worshipping G-d. Nadav and Avihu wanted to play a role in the dedication of the Mishkan and Korach and his men wanted to share in the roles of the kohanim and the leadership of the people. Yet our parsha makes clear that Korach and his men rebelled out of self-interest, and merely cloaked their claims in the ideological argument that a holy nation has no need for leaders. (This did not stop them from trying to assume positions of leadership themselves.) From here we can infer that Nadav and Avihu were also motivated by self-interest, and not just by a desire for greater holiness.

20. Rav Chanoch Waxman, "Korach and the Incense Challenge", Virtual Bet Midrash,
[https://www.etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-bamidbar/parashat-korach/korach-incense-challenge:](https://www.etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-bamidbar/parashat-korach/korach-incense-challenge)

...In this light, as the narrative develops and Moshe draws the parallel between the incense challenge and the deaths of Nadav and Avihu ever tighter, the persistence of the Israelite princes becomes harder and harder to understand. Do they not remember what happened to Nadav and Avihu? Or do they think that their acts will not be considered a violation, and the challenge is in fact a real test, something other than a sophisticated death threat? Or perhaps they are quite aware of the risk of death, but are nevertheless willing to take their chances?...

When and where did the events take place? The Torah gives us neither a time nor a place. The answer is sometime, somewhere. Sometime and somewhere in the vast emptiness of time and space that comprises a forty years journey to nowhere. It happens sometime and somewhere after the sin of the spies and the awful decree of God.

Why did they persist? On some level, the answer can be stated in one word: despair. Despair is a powerful psychological phenomenon. Under its influence, we can suppress that which we truly know and imagine ourselves to know other things all together. How hard would it be to forget, ignore or partially repress the death of Nadav and Avihu?... While God had not commanded Nadav and Avihu's offering and it was truly "a foreign fire," the incense test constitutes a different story altogether. It is commanded by Moshe and will surely not result in divine wrath. Forgetting for the moment that they have lost faith in Moshe and his leadership, the princes rationalized that the test is proposed by Moshe himself, the one who speaks for God. Where despair reigns, logic and consistency cannot expect to find a foothold...

...Moreover, under the influence of despair, how hard would it be to engage in false hope? How hard would it be to imagine, if just for a minute, that maybe Korach, Datan and Aviram are right? ... If God is with them and they are indeed holy, they should emerge unscathed from the test. If God is with them and they are indeed holy, Moshe is incorrect, and there is no need for an elite cast of priests. Each and every member of Israel is holy. And finally, if they do indeed die, which fate is the worse, to die on a journey to nowhere, or to die on a quest for the divine, engaged in his service, sanctified like Nadav and Avihu as "bikrovai ekadesh"?