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The Mercy Shown to Eleazar and Ithamar

10: 12-20

The mercy shown to Eleazar and Ithamar DIG: How did Aaron react to the death of Nadab and Abihu? Why weren't they burned up by fire from ADONAI like Nadab and Abihu were? How did their deaths affect Eleazar and Ithamar?

REFLECT: Despite all your best intentions, when was the last time you messed up in your service to the Lord? How severe was it? Did the Lord have to discipline you? What did you learn from the whole experience? How can you help others to avoid the same mistake?

The Torah displays both judgment and mercy.

Moshe had instructed Aaron to offer a male goat for a **purification offering** and a calf and a lamb, both a year old and without defect, for a **burnt offering**, and an ox and a ram for a **peace offering** to sacrifice before ADONAI for the people; also, a grain offering mixed with olive oil - because today ADONAI is going to appear to you (9:3-5).

In this section **Moses** addressed **Aaron** and **his** remaining **sons**, **Eleazar and Ithamar**, regarding the eating of the sacrifices offered on the eighth day of the inauguration of the priesthood. Although of extreme importance, the central section describing the role of the priests was but an interlude in the narrative framework of this chapter.¹⁵¹ Evidently **the grain offering (to see link click [Aj](#) - The Grain Offerings)**, which was to be offered along with **the burnt offering**, had not been **eaten**. So, **Moshe said to Aaron and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his remaining sons**, "Take the grain offering left from the offerings for ADONAI made by fire, and eat it without leaven next to the altar, because it is especially holy. Eat it in a holy place, because it is yours and your sons' share of the offerings for ADONAI made by fire; for this is what I have been ordered. The breast that was waved and the thigh that was raised you are to eat in a clean place - you, your sons and your daughters with you; for these are given as yours and your children's share of the sacrifices of the peace offerings presented by the people of Isra'el. They are to bring the raised thigh and the waved breast, along

with the offerings of fat made by fire, and wave it as a wave offering before ADONAI; then it will belong to you and your descendants with you as your perpetual share, as ADONAI has ordered” (10:12-15). Moses reminded Aaron and his sons that despite the disaster of Nadab and Abihu’s death, the priestly privileges were not forfeited. By God’s command those parts of the sacrifice were their permanent due (see [Au](#) - The Wave Offering and Priestly Portion).

The first problem: Evidently right after the deaths of Nadab and Abihu there was supposed to be a peace offering (see [Az](#) - The Peace Offering Ram) that was to be brought into the Tabernacle. Then a dispute breaks out between Moshe and Aaron, El’azar and Ithamar over how the peace offering was offered. Moses says that it wasn’t offered properly and Aaron comes to his sons’ defense and says that it really was. Why are they arguing about this? There had just been a terrible tragedy, Aaron’s sons, El’azar and Ithamar’s brothers had just died, and now they were arguing about if, or how, they messed up when they offered the peace offering? Why were they debating sacrificial mitzvah now?

Dear Heavenly Father, Praise Your love and wisdom always. Thank You so much that when You look at a person, what You see as most important is the heart. But ADONAI said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or his stature. . . For God does not see a man as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but ADONAI looks into the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). The reason behind why something is done is what is most important. When Aaron and his sons did not use their right to eat the meat of the peace offering ram, they were showing their heart of humbleness and piety before You, God. They were being bowed down in grief and sadness over the sin of their brothers.

Thank You for Your modeling for us that even when You have rights, as You do as our Creator, setting aside Your right was the most unbelievable gesture. That is what Messiah did when He laid aside His right to glory in heaven (John 17:5) and took on the form of man -though still God (Philippians 2:6-11). We want to always follow You with our hearts overflowing with love for You. In the holy name of Jesus and the power of His resurrection. Amen

The second problem: Then Moshe carefully investigated (these two words mark the Torah’s exact midpoint) what had happened to the goat of the purification offering (9:3 and 15) and discovered that the entire carcass of the people’s purification offering had been burned up as if it were a burnt offering (10:16a). Evidently, El’azar and Ithamar had placed the goat for the purification offering on the bronze altar, but

possibly in **their** grief over the loss of **their brothers**, **they** had inadvertently allowed the entire offering to be burned up. **Moshe** was beside **himself**. Two **priests** had already died, two more had made a grievous mistake. It must have seemed to **him** that just as **the priesthood** had begun, **they** were all dying.

Thus, **he became angry with El'azar and Ithamar, the remaining sons of Aaron**, and asked: "**Why didn't you eat the purification offering in the Holy Place** (see [Ai - The Purification Offering](#)), as you were supposed to, **since it is especially holy? God gave it to you to take away the guilt of the community, to make atonement for them before ADONAI (10:16b-17). Look! Its blood wasn't brought into the sanctuary! If the blood** had been taken into the holy place, then the carcass would properly have been burned outside the camp. But that wasn't the case. **You should have eaten it there in the holy place, as I ordered" (10:18)!** What is the role of the priests here? They were called upon to **eat the purification offering** to restore the people to **ADONAI**. **They** were to restore the boundary between **God** and them, which had been violated by their not **eating the meat of the peace offering ram**. With **the eating of the peace offering**, the circle is closed and the boundary restored. But **they** didn't **eat the meat**. However, **the fire** from **Ha'Shem** didn't come.

Aaron, Spirit-filled but heavy-hearted, answered Moshe. He reminded **his brother** that two of **his sons** had, in the beginning of the day, presented **their purification and burnt offerings for themselves** (see [Bd - The Offerings for Aaron and the Priests](#)) before setting out to minister on behalf of the nation. Now they are dead. **Aaron** and **his** two remaining **sons** alone remained in the Tabernacle as representatives of the nation, and in **their** grief, **they** had mishandled **the goat purification offering**.



Aaron said: **Even though they offered their peace offering and burnt offering today, things like these have happened to me!** As a dad, **Aaron** had just lost **his** two boys. Humanly, **he** was crushed. So, **he** said: **If I had eaten the peace offering today, would it have pleased ADONAI (10:19).** In other words, **Aaron** was asking for mercy of **his** grief-filled **heart**. When you are a high priest, your official duties almost always eclipse your role as a private individual. But not always. And for one brief moment, **Aaron** the human, in **his** own struggle with **God**, had to eclipse **Aaron** the high priest, and it was okay.¹⁵² **On hearing this reply**, although **Moses** was zealous for the Word of **God**, **he** understood the plight of **his brother**, and **he** was also moved, since **El'azar and Ithamar** were **his** nephews. **He** did not condone the wrong. But **Aaron's** reason for not complying made sense and was accepted by **Moses**: since **priestly** sin was involved it did not seem right in this situation to eat the meal. The Bible says that **Moshe was satisfied . . .** and so was **ADONAI (10:20).**

How did the situation here differ from the one with **Nadab** and **Abihu** (see [Bh - The Death of Nadab and Abihu](#))? Perhaps it was the same for both. Yes, **Eleazar** and **Ithamar** did make a big mistake. But **Ha'Shem** did not kill **them** because **their hearts** were sincere, there was no pride or malice, so **they** were shown mercy and spared. **Jonah** made a big mistake by disobeying **God** and running away from **Him**. But because **his heart** was in the right place, **he** was spared (swallowed) and allowed to finish **his** task (see the commentary on [Jonah Ax - The Ninevites Believed God](#)). **David** committed adultery and murder, yet because **he** was **a man after God's own heart (First Samuel 13:14)**, **he** was forgiven (not without consequences), and **Messiah** will make **him king** of the Jewish branch of government during **the Messianic Kingdom** (see the commentary on [Revelation Fi - The Government of the Messianic Kingdom](#)). **Peter** denied **Yeshua** **three times**, but because **his heart** was in the right place **the Lord** brought **him** near again (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Mn - Jesus Reinstates Peter](#)) and gave **him the keys to the Kingdom** that brought in **the Jews** (see the commentary on [Acts An - Peter Speaks to the Shavu'ot Crowd](#)), **the Samaritans** (see the commentary on [Acts Az - The Good News Spreads to Samaria](#)), and **the Gentiles** (see the commentary on [Acts Bg - Peter Goes to the House of Cornelius](#)) into the Kingdom of **God**. **ADONAI** is a **God** of second chances.¹⁵³

Nowhere in the B'rit Chadashah is this particular episode referred to, though there are a number of lines of theological continuity linking this passage to New Covenant teaching. The disciple must put allegiance to **Messiah** before the family (**Matthew 8:21-22**). **Messianic** rabbis and pastors must, like **Aaronic priests**, should be temperate (**First Timothy 3:3 and 8**). But the most striking principle endorsed by the B'rit Chadashah is that the closer a man is to **ADONAI**, the stricter the standard **he** will be judged by (**Leviticus**

10:3). Our **Lord** said: **Everyone to whom much is given, of him will much be required (Luke 12:48).** And **Peter** said: **Judgment begins with the household of God (First Peter 4:17).** **James** echoed that statement when he said: **Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, since you know that we will be judged more severely (James 3:1).** The tragedy of **Nadab and Abihu** vividly illustrates these New Covenant sayings.¹⁵⁴