

# Maybe

## Rav Jason Knapel

I was looking through my old notes the other day (yes I did take notes when I was younger) and I noticed something that was a great opening for a rabbinic joke:

What is the connection between Parashat Shmini, Sefirat HaOmer and Yom HaShoah? The only problem was that the notes did not give an answer, but instead referenced me to other notes that I do not have.

I think the connection may be as follows: All three cases have to do with the destruction of the next generation of leadership. A major theme of Parashat Shmini is the death of Nadav & Avihu the sons of Aharon HaKohen. We are used to thinking of the two as evil fellows who deserved to die because of the sin that they committed. This is the way we are taught when younger to avoid all the sticky theological questions that come along with the incident. Even if one were to accept this point of view – which many of the mefarshim rightfully do – we often miss the point that they were the ones who were going to take over for Aharon and maybe even Moshe. With their death, the next generation of leaders needed to be created.

Within Sefirat HaOmer there is a general theme of the death of the students of Rebbe Akiva, although this is not Biblical, it stills has much influence on the tone of these days. Why mourn for such an incident – a tragedy, when there have been worse. The answer I think is because we are not mourning for the loss of life alone, but rather what that life represented – the loss of the next generation of conveyors of Torah SheBeal Peh. It was not only they that died but the entire rabbinic Judaism was put in danger and with no one to pass down a true tradition, Judaism would be lost.

The Shoah was one of the most tragic events in our history. The systematic murder of our people in such a torturous manner has left an indelible mark on our national conscious. Along with the loss of life came the loss of lives that were specifically of those who lead the generation. The leaders of Judaism were the first to be hunted down and killed. I often think that within the context of the greater tragedy we do not understand how this loss of leadership has destroyed a part of Judaism forever.

Although these three events are related the affects of each are different as well.

The death of Nadav & Avihu was not felt in Bnei Yisrael. Moshe and Aharon were alive and continued to lead Bnei Yisrael for many years. They successfully transmitted their leadership role to others and had the time needed to train them.

The loss of the Talmidei Rebbe Akiva was felt more acutely but this loss was made up for when Rebbe Akiva passed the leadership mantle to five (much less than the 12,000 pairs) 'Super Talmidim' who then disseminated Torah to all of Bnei Yisrael.

The loss from the Shoah has never been countered. I know for myself that I do not even appreciate what the loss is, let alone make up for that loss. And in our generation it is even worse as we are missing a leader that all Jews can call their own. What we might have gained in the political sphere, with the establishment of the State, we have lost within the religious sphere with the loss of all the rich traditions from Europe.

Even on erev Yom HaShoah I do not want to leave with a “downer” so here is a thought. Maybe if each of us tries to connect to what was lost, to learn about what once was and try to adapt that to what is now, maybe if each of us tries to lead in some way keeping in mind that we are not a “new” generation, but a continuation of the past and at the same time dealing with the challenges of the present, we can all in some way lessen the loss of the Shoah as we create a beautiful new life based upon the traditions of old.

Maybe.....  
Shabbat Shalom  
Rav K