

As It Is Written

Hell is full of good intentions ...”
-- St. Bernard of Clairvaux

Here is the second of the three texts in this series of articles dealing with good intentions. As it is written (Lev 10:1-7),

¹ And the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, took each of them his fire-pan and put fire in it and placed incense upon it and brought forward unfit fire before the LORD, which He had not charged them. And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them each.

In the face of this horror, Aaron stands mute. However, God is still not done. Through Moses, the LORD forbids the immediate families to mourn their loss.

And Moses said to Aaron and to Eleazar and to Ithamar his sons, “Your heads you shall not dishevel nor your garments rend, lest you die and the fury come upon the whole community. [Rather] your brothers, the whole house of Israel, may wail for the burning that the LORD has inflicted (Literally “the burning that the LORD has burned”).

Later, in verses 19 and 20, the exchange between Moses and Aaron is especially poignant. The grieving father asks his own brother whether God could really expect him to constrain himself to fast in the moment of his grief and Moses concedes the point. Aaron's argument is not without merit. Nevertheless, even in the face of the overwhelming emotion due to the loss of two of his children, Aaron was not to have let his grief prevent his following through on his obligation.

OK, what is going on here?

By this time in the story of the Israelites, an elaborate system of sacrificial regulations, capped by the rites of installation, had been instituted. This disaster reminds the Israelites that good intentions, no matter what their aim (in this case, reverence for, and worship of, God) must never be elevated above God's will. The consequences can be especially dire for those directly charged by God to lead the people in worship.

Now, go and study