**Miller’s Musings** **פרשת שְּׁמִינִי**

Death is generally considered avoidable wherever possible and certainly a death that involves being engulfed by heavenly flames, the way in which Aharon’s sons, Nadav and Avihu, met their end.   Yet we know that every punishment that is incurred upon a person by Hashem is no arbitrary penalty, but a precisely chosen one that perfectly mirrors the crime that induced such a response, in every detail.  There is in fact a disagreement discussed about one such aspect, whether the fire consumed their bodies and insides or only their insides.  It therefore requires us to understand what this particular element represented and what the point of dispute signifies.

This one facet of their fate, as explained by Rabbi Shaul Katzenellenbogen, can be understand as a parallel to another point of contention, with regard to the manner in which the two sons erred.  According to one opinion, as they walked behind Moshe and Aharon they contemplated, without actually uttering a word, as to when those two great leaders would die so that they could take over their positions.  The second opinion is that they actually verbalised this thought aloud.  According to the first opinion, that the sin was an inner one, they were punished only internally, with the fire restricted to their internal organs.  Correspondingly the second opinion, that they gave voice to this inappropriate comment, resulted in their outer body also being incinerated.

When it comes to our actions, we all realise that there can be much room for improvement and understand that negative deeds can have destructive consequences.  With regard to our thoughts, however, there can be a tendency to belittle the damage we cause through negative perceptions, judgements and beliefs and somewhat demean the importance of work in this area.  This is a grave mistake, firstly because, as we have seen, there will also be a reckoning for this, and secondly because so much of what we do is actually determined by what we think.  We have to realise that we can control how we perceive our reality and the way in which we understand our situation, and that the wrong notions can have devastating effects on what we do.   To shape our mind according to the ideals of the Torah is both possible and essential and will shape our every action and every moment.

May Shabbos bring clarity to our thoughts this week.

לעילוי נשמת לאה בת אברהם

