

A Hol(y) in One

Parshat Achrei Mot /Kedoshim: Leviticus 16:1-20:27

Haftarah: Amos 9:7-15

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You may have missed it, but this week a small heroic act made it to the headlines. Brian Davis, a 35 year old professional golfer lost a championship game when he called a penalty on himself for violating one of the rules regarding fair play on the golf course. For golfing fans, this is the story of the great Bobbie Jones told all over again, a man who in 1925 similarly lost a championship for calling a penalty stroke on himself. Both of these athletes could have easily looked the other way. But they didn't.

While this week's heroism only cost Davis a portion of the total winnings, the act itself is worth retelling. The truth is no one would have noticed. It even took sophisticated television equipment to slow down his movements and analyze where he made the mistake. His heroism is in knowing his mistake and having the integrity to admit it, without a referee's whistle blow. Put even more succinctly - he played by the rules.

Moments like these happen to us everyday. Whether you're a professional athlete or a leader in a community, the opportunities to look the other way from our shortcomings or our mistakes are everywhere. The *Yezter HaRa* lurks in shadows and in the light. But, we shouldn't gloss over the times when the world acknowledges a small, but significantly righteous act.

It is in this week's portion that we discover the reason why such ethical behavior is the cornerstone of the Jewish identity and soul. It begins with the words, *Achrei Mot* - after death - and cryptically refers to the loss of Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, when they "drew too close to the Presence of God" (16:1). Their sin, we now learn, was one of proximity.

Our sages suggest here that Nadav and Avihu's fatal sin was that they believed their superior status enabled them to encounter God whenever and however they saw fit. But in their conceit, they missed something, something maybe we could notice if the sophisticated technology of television and recording equipment were present on that fateful day. Perhaps we learn the only time we can be too close to God is when our thoughts do not match our actions. That is why the Torah continues to outline the guidelines for Aaron's presence in the Holy of Holies, a once a year occasion on Yom Kippur. Yes, being in the public eye wields the adulation of many, and it sometimes lures us into believing we can look the other way on slight indiscretions. This week, we are reminded of the consequences of such negligence.

I'm not a golfer, nor a fan of the sport. But I do admire the courage of Brian Davis and his incredible ability to remain honest and focused in a time of great challenge. A self-determined penalty shot on the golf course is an insignificant act that reveals great character. Surely he will only grow in his success by living this way. We can approximate our own greatness by following his example and the lessons we gain from Nadav and Avihu too.