

## A Reaction to Personal Tragedy

### Levit., Chapter 10

1. And Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, each took his pan, put fire in them, and placed incense upon it, and they brought before the L-rd foreign fire, which He had not commanded them.
2. And fire went forth from before the L-rd and consumed them, and they died before the L-rd.
3. Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the L-rd spoke, [when He said], 'I will be sanctified through those near to Me, and before all the people I will be glorified.' " And Aaron was silent.

*And Moses said to Aaron: "This is it that which G-d spoke, saying: I will be sanctified in those who are close to Me..." (10:3)*

#### Midrash Rabbah; Rashi

This was said to Moses at Sinai, but its meaning was not known to him until the occurrence happened, when Moses said to Aaron: "My brother, at Sinai, G-d said to me: 'I will sanctify this House, and through a great man would I sanctify it,' and I thought that either through me or through you would this House be sanctified; but now I see that your two sons are greater than you or I."

*And Aaron was silent (10:3)*

#### Chullin 78a

When struck with calamity, a person should cry out, so that others will know and will pray for him

#### Midrash Rabbah

Because Aaron was silent, he was rewarded that G-d spoke exclusively to him (ordinarily G-d spoke to Aaron only in conjunction with--or through--Moses).

#### Talmud, Berachot 6b

Said Rav Papa: The merit of attending a house of mourning lies in the silence observed.

#### Joshua (10:5-13)

*The five Amorite kings...and their armies gathered together and marched up to Gibeon. They encamped near it and attacked...G-d said to Joshua: "Do not be afraid of them for I will deliver them in your hands. No one will be able to withstand you." On the day when G-d routed the Amorites before the Israelites, Joshua spoke to G-d and he said before the Israelites: "Sun, halt in Gibeon, and moon, in the Valley of Ayyalon." The sun halted (vayidom) and the moon stood still.*

#### Rashi

*Dom means "be silent" here as it usually does; when the sun ceases praising G-d, it halts in its path.*

#### Alshich

*Why was this miracle necessary? The sun suspended its normal course because this is what G-d wanted; to demonstrate G-d's dominion over the sun and stars, proving that He alone was responsible for the Israelites victories.*

*with those near to Me*

#### Rashi

My chosen ones.



#### פרקי

א. ויקחו בני אהרן נדב ונאביהוא איש מחתתו ויתנו בהן אש וישמו עליה קטרת ויקרבו לפני ה' אש זרה אשר לא צוה אתם: ב. ותצא אש מלפני ה' ותאכל אותם וימתו לפני ה': ג. ויאמר משה אל אהרן הוא אשר דבר ה' לאמר בקרבי אקדש ועל פני כל העם אקבד וידם אהרן:

## Menachot 29b

The Aggada describes Moses's vision of the death of the great sage Akiva at the hands of the Romans. Moses asks to see the reward granted Rabbi Akiva for dedication to Torah and is shown the vision of Akiva's tortured body, hung on meat hooks and burned alive. Then said Moses, 'L-rd of the Universe, Thou has shown me his Torah, show me his reward'. 'Turn thee round', said He; and Moses turned round and saw them weighing out his flesh at the market-stalls. 'L-rd of the Universe', cried Moses, 'such Torah, and such a reward!' He replied, 'Be silent; such arose in My Mind in front of Me.'

### Rabbi Nachman of Breslav Likuttei Maharan

Through his silence Moses can hear the Word of G-d. There are times that words are superfluous; they create artificial barriers and prevent us from understanding G-d's Mind. If one wishes to "arise" and understand the thoughts of G-d, then silence is the vehicle to arrive at that lofty place.

### R' Soloveitchik

There is a head on collision as it were between a person in mourning and the Sabbath day, when one is halachically not supposed to mourn. The mourner who has buried a beloved wife or a mother who returns home from the cemetery is in a mood to question our entire axiological universe. Yet the halacha whispers to him: Rise from your mourning, cast off your ashes from your head. Change your clothes, light the festive candles. The halacha suggests to man, broken in spirit that he change his mood, cast off his grief and choose joy.

### The Lubavitcher Rebbe

Speech signifies comprehensibility. Melody is beyond language, expressing moods which words cannot describe. Silence is yet higher. The power to be silent at certain moments of life and of history is an important strength. It expresses the awareness that G-d is infinite, and cannot be encapsulated in our human conceptions of what should take place. This is not to say that the Torah advocates a fatalistic approach to life. Before the event, one must do everything possible to prevent tragedy. But once it has happened, G-d forbid, through the acceptance and the silence we reach a special closeness to the Divine. Our Sages tell us that because Aaron was silent, he was rewarded by G-d speaking directly to him. In our generation, too, there is a need for this power of silence. It is not a passive power, but one that leads to vigorous and joyous action. The Jewish response to the harrowing events of the Shoah is the determined and energetic action to rebuild Jewish family life and Jewish knowledge. Through our power of silence we too, like Aaron, will merit Divine revelation. G-d will bring the Messiah, rebuilding the Temple and bringing lasting peace to the world.

## SUMMARY

- Aaron remained silent and composed out of a sense of subservience to the Almighty. He believed, as difficult as it was to comprehend, that it was God's will that this tragedy should befall him, and so he remained silent. His silence was the result of his unbridled devotion to the will of G-d.
- Aaron's reward for remaining silent was that G-d taught him directly a portion of laws. Our awareness of our limited understanding of G-d's perfect justice and mercy is the divine expansion of our knowledge.
- Though we are not expected to react like Aaron, life is rarely easy. To accept life's challenges, we need to cultivate our faith, through the belief that G-d runs the world. This faith is what enables us to live through difficult situations, and to reach an acceptance even when life isn't as easy as we would have ideally wanted.

