

Parashat Shemini: Screaming With Silence

Rabbi Joshua Rabin, Astoria Center of Israel, Astoria, New York¹

Vayikra 10:3	
וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-אַהֲרֹן הוּא אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר יְהוָה לֵאמֹר בְּקִרְבִּי אֶקְדֹּשׁ וְעַל-פָּנָי כָּל-הָעָם אֶכְבֹּד וַיֵּדֶם אַהֲרֹן:	Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what God meant by saying: Through those near to Me I show Myself holy, And gain glory before all the people." And Aaron was silent.

1. Silence and Punishment

Midrash Vayikra Rabbah 12:2	
רַבִּי יִצְחָק פָּתַח: נִמְצְאוּ דְבָרַי וְאֵלֶם וַיְהִי דְבָרָי לִי לְשִׁשּׁוֹן וְלִשְׂמֻחַת לִבִּי כִּי נִקְרָא שְׁמִי עָלַי ה' אֱלֹהֵי צָבָאוֹת, אָמַר רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחֲמָן זֶה הַדְּבָר נֶאֱמַר לְמֹשֶׁה בְּסִינִי, וְלֹא נֹדַע לוֹ עַד שֶׁבָּא מִעֲשֵׂה לִידוֹ. אָמַר מֹשֶׁה לְאַהֲרֹן, אָחִי, בְּסִינִי נֶאֱמַר לִי שְׁאֲנִי עֲתִיד לְקַדֵּשׁ אֶת הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה, וּבָאֲדָם גָּדוֹל אָנִי מִקֹּדֶשׁ, וְהִיִּיתִי סָבוֹר שֶׁמָּא אוֹ בִּי אוֹ בְּךָ הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה מִתְקַדֵּשׁ, וְעַכְשָׁיו שְׁנֵי בָנֶיךָ גְּדוֹלִים מִמֶּנִּי וּמִמֶּךָ. כִּיֵּן שָׁשַׁמְעָה אַהֲרֹן שֶׁבָּנָיו יֹרְאִי שְׁמִים הֵן, שֶׁתֵּן וְקִבֵּל שָׁכָר עַל שְׁתִּיקָתוֹ, וּמִנֵּין שֶׁשִּׁתֵּן, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וַיֵּדֶם אַהֲרֹן, וּמִנֵּין שֶׁקִּבֵּל שָׁכָר עַל שְׁתִּיקָתוֹ, שֶׁזָּכָה וּנְתִיחַד אֵלָיו הַדְּבָר, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וַיִּדְבֶּר ה' אֶל אַהֲרֹן.	Rabbi Yitzhak began: "Your words were revealed, and I consumed them; Your words were gladness for me and the joy of my heart because Your name was called upon me, Lord, God of hosts" (Jeremiah 15:16). Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahman said: This statement was said to Moses at Sinai, but its [meaning] was not known to him until he encountered the incident. Moses said to Aaron: 'My brother, it was stated to me at Sinai that I [God] am destined to sanctify this House, and it is with a great man that I will sanctify it. I believed that perhaps it was through [the death of] either you or me that this House would be sanctified. Now, your two sons are greater than me and you.' When Aaron heard that his sons were God-fearing, he was silent and rewarded for his silence. From where is it derived that he was silent? "Aaron was silent" (Lev. 10:3). From where is it derived that he was rewarded for his silence? It is because he was privileged, and the divine speech was directed to him alone, as stated: "The Lord spoke to Aaron."

Rashbam on Vayikra 10:3	
וידום אהרן - מאבלותו ולא בכה ולא התאבל...	And Aaron was silent- he desisted from his mourning, did not weep, and did not perform the mourning rites.

Hovot HaLevavot (Duties of the Heart), Section Three- Service of God 6:8	
ומי שימרה האלהים בטובה אשר ייחדהו בה יפול מכל המעלות היתרות וידקדק עליו הבורא בחשבון יותר בעוה"ז כמ"ש הוא אשר דבר ה' לאמר בקרובי אקדש ועל פני כל העם אכבד וידם אהרן	But whoever rebels against God, despite the beneficence which God has specially bestowed upon him, will fall from all these degrees, and the Creator will hold him more strictly to account in this world, as it is said, "this is it that the Lord spoke, saying, I will be

¹ All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

<p>ואמר רק אתכם ידעתי מכל משפחות האדמה על כן אפקוד עליכם ויהיה עוד עונשו בעוה"ב יותר קשה כמ"ש כי ערוך מאתמול תפתה גם היא למלך הוכן העמיק הרחיב וגו'.</p>	<p>sanctified in them that come near Me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace" (Lev. 10:3); furthermore, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). His punishment in the next world will be more severe, as it is said: "For Tophet (Gehinom) is ordained of old; yea, for the king it is prepared; He has made it deep and large. He makes great with fire and wood. The breath of God kindles it, like a torrent of brimstone" (Isaiah 30:33).</p>
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2. Silence and Reward

Midrash Tanhuma, Aharei Mot 5:1	
<p>רבי ברכיה פתח, גם ענוש לצדיק לא טוב להכות נדיבים על ישר. אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא, אף על פי שענשתי לאהרן ונטלתי שני בניו ממנו, לא טוב, אלא להכות נדיבים על ישר.</p>	<p>R. Berekhyah opened (his discourse with Prov. 17:26), "To punish also the righteous is not good; to smite the noble ones for uprightness." Said the Holy One, blessed be He, "Although I punished Aaron (for the golden calf) by taking his two children from him, it is not good. It was only "to smite the noble ones for uprightness."</p>

Bavli Zevachim 115b	
<p>דבר זה אמר הקב"ה למשה ולא ידעו עד שמתו בני אהרן כיון שמתו בני אהרן אמר לו אהרן אחי לא מתו בניך אלא להקדיש שמו של הקב"ה כיון שידע אהרן שבניו ידועי מקום הן שתק וקבל שכר שנאמר וידום אהרן</p>	<p>The Holy One, Blessed be He, said this statement to Moses, but Moses did not know [its meaning] until the sons of Aaron died. Once the sons of Aaron died, Moses said to him: Aaron, my brother, your sons died only to sanctify the name of the Holy One, Blessed be He. When Aaron knew that the Omnipresent loved his sons, he was silent and received a reward, as it is stated: "And Aaron held his peace [vayidom]."</p>

Rashi on Vayikra 10:3	
<p>וידם אהרן - קבל שכר על שתיקתו, ומה שכר קבל? שנתחד עמו הדבור - שנאמר לו לבדו פרשת שתוי יין:</p>	<p>And Aaron was silent— He was rewarded for his silence. And what was the reward he received? That the subsequent Divine address was made to him alone and not to Moses also — for to him alone was spoken the section (vv. 9—11) dealing with those who are intoxicated by wine (see v. 8) (Leviticus Rabbah 12:2).</p>

Seforno on Vayikra 10:3	
<p>וידום אהרן. שהתנחם בקידוש ה' שנקדש במותם:</p>	<p>And Aaron was silent— he consoled himself in the sanctification of the Divine Name through which their deaths were made holy..</p>

3. Screaming with Silence

Langston Hughes, "Silence" (1941)		
<p>I catch the pattern Of your silence Before you speak</p>	<p>I do not need To hear a word.</p>	<p>In your silence Every tone I seek Is heard.</p>