

**Parashat Korach**  
**Rabbi Daniel Fridman**

**The Still, Deep Waters of Silence**  
***An Appreciation of Aharon HaKohen***

If there is one figure in Torah who is famous for a moment of profound silence, it is Aharon. Upon witnessing the instantaneous death of his sons Nadav and Avihu, Aharon contains, within himself, the dialectical tension of the moment: he is pulled in one direction as an inconsolable, doubly bereaved father, and in the opposite direction by his ongoing responsibilities as Kohen Gadol. Given these two equal and opposite forces, Aharon's choice is silence, not the quiet of having nothing to say, but a quiet where there is nothing that can possibly be said.

Aharon's capacity to project spiritual dignity through silence is all the more impressive in light of his generally genial and outgoing nature, on account of which he has been immortalized as Chazal's paragon of warmth, inclusiveness, and interpersonal concern. In any case, even as Aharon's silence upon learning of his son's death is the most celebrated example of such quiet fortitude, there is another instance of profound silence in Aharon's life that bears careful examination.

Korach's rebellion, to be sure, was directed against Moshe, and the legitimacy of his leadership. A careful reading of this week's sedra, however, reveals that Aharon, and his position as Kohen Gadol, was the true subject of Korach's envy. Unlike Moshe, who reacts vigilantly to Korach's charges, and at multiple levels, Aharon does not react at all; once again, Aharon chooses silence.

Ramban takes note of Aharon's pure quietude, and attributes this response to Aharon's signal humility. Aharon, Ramban asserts, was projecting a sense that, as far he was concerned, Korach may well have been more qualified than he was for the post of Kohen Gadol. The only reason which Aharon continued to serve in the position, dubious as he was of his own qualifications, was that he had been commanded to do so. As far as his being the best candidate for the post, Aharon, unlike recent Vice Presidents, was prepared to give no self-endorsement.

Ironically, it was precisely this self-doubt, this sense of his own limitations, that made Aharon a finer and more deserving candidate than Korach could ever be. If there is one cherished virtue when it comes to serving as Kohen Gadol, as the atoner-in-chief for all of Israel, it is an abiding sense of one's own frailty and fallibility. Even if Aharon possessed no other qualities to recommend him for the position, which he most certainly did, his capacity to react to Korach's vicious personal assault without a shred of defensiveness, but rather with abundant modesty, would itself, in my view, set him apart.

While Moshe is most widely celebrated for his humility, we would do well to remember Aharon's as well. Perhaps it was most manifest during Korach's malicious rebellion, but truly, it was always thus. From the moment Moshe returned from the deserts of Midian to a role of prominence, Aharon did not grudgingly step aside for his younger brother, but did so with 'joy in his heart.' We, who aspire to Hillel's mandate to be counted amongst Aharon's students, behold, with a mixture of reverence and love, a man whose essence was suffused with an authentic humility. Often, his greatness was expressed in genuine warmth and concern for others, 'through love of his fellow man, bringing them close to Torah'. Of equal importance, however, was his capacity for silences which revealed something of his essence, the still waters of spiritual depth.