



Rabbi Katz's Abridged Written Drashah for Parshat Shemini

In the aftermath of Nadav and Avihu's death, all eyes were on Aharon. The first and most pivotal High Priest, the representative of the Jewish people, in a brand new building for which he is ultimately responsible, just lost his children. How will he respond?

Moshe tells Aharon, "this is what Hashem said- I will be sanctified through those who are close to me... and Aharon was silent" (Vayikra 10:3). Aharon's response was to not have one.

The Gemara in Brachot tells us that the greatest reward in a house of mourning is reserved for the one who remains silent (6b). There is a discussion among the commentaries about whether this refers to the mourners themselves or to those who come to console them. According to the first opinion, Aharon seems to exemplify this silence. As Moshe implies, when confronted with death, our beyond-nature aspiration is to realize Hashem's plan in the world, and see how this death -as tragic as it may be- is part of that plan. In recognition of this, Aharon was silent. He accepted the fate of his children as if it was ordained by Hashem, like everything else.

On the other hand, the Gemara could refer to those who console. The Gemara in Moed Katan (28b) says that anyone who comes to comfort the mourner must not speak until spoken to. There may be other reasons, but perhaps one explanation of this law is to remind us that the current moment and place is not about us. When one enters the house of a mourner, the purpose is to comfort the mourner and honor the deceased. Before even anything happens, we must respectfully take the focus off of ourselves and sit quietly, as if to nullify our own existence for the sake of others.

In this way, perhaps we recognize our own mortality. We gain a greater appreciation for the delicate nature of life, thereby honoring those who have lost it. This week we will observe the solemn day of Yom HaZikaron. Traditionally, the State of Israel blares a siren throughout the country and every single person stops what they're doing, even on the road, and observes a moment of silence. This moment allows us to similarly appreciate those who have lost their lives in an attempt to protect the lives of others.

Silence is not only the absence of speech, but rather an active sacrifice of the self. When we hold ourselves back from acting, speaking, or contributing, we subtly announce that whatever or whomever is in front of us is more deserving of attention than ourselves.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Katz

This Dvar Torah is sponsored by Dov & Esther Sherizen in loving memory of his father, Paul Sherizen.