

Parsha Plug: Parshat Shemini

Vayikra 10:1-11, 16-20	ויקרא י:א-יא, טז-כ
<p>1 And Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu, each took his pan, put fire in them, and placed incense upon it, and they brought before the Lord foreign fire, which He had not commanded them. 2 And fire went forth from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. 3 Then Moshe said to Aharon, "This is what the Lord spoke, [when He said], 'I will be sanctified through those near to Me, and before all the people I will be glorified'". And Aharon was silent. 4 And Moshe summoned Mishael and Eltzafan, the sons of Aharon's uncle Uzziel, and said to them, "Draw near; carry your kinsmen from within the Sanctuary, to the outside of the camp". 5 So they approached and carried them with their tunics to the outside of the camp, as Moshe had spoken. 6 And Moshe said to Aharon and to Elazar and to Itamar, his sons, "Do not leave your heads unshorn, and do not rend your garments, so that you shall not die, and lest He be angry with the entire community, but your brothers, the entire house of Israel, shall bewail the conflagration that the Lord has burned. 7 And do not go out of the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, lest you die, because the Lord's anointing oil is upon you." And they did according to Moshe' order. 8 And the Lord spoke to Aharon, saying, 9 "Do not drink wine that will lead to intoxication, neither you nor your sons with you, when you go into the Tent of Meeting, so that you shall not die. [This is] an eternal statute for your generations, 10 to distinguish between holy and profane and between unclean and clean, 11 and to instruct the children of Israel regarding all the statutes which the Lord has spoken to them through Moshe"...[Moshe gives the instruction for the kohanim to still eat the leftover mincha offering] 16 And Moshe thoroughly investigated concerning the sin offering he goat, and behold, it had been burnt! So he was angry with Eleazar and Itamar, Aharon's surviving sons, saying, 17 "Why did you not eat the sin offering in the holy place? For it is holy of holies, and He has given it to you to gain forgiveness for the sin of the community, to effect their atonement before the Lord! 18 Behold, its blood was not brought into the Sanctuary within, so you should have surely eaten it within holy [precincts], as I commanded!" 19 And Aharon spoke to Moshe, "But today, did they offer up their sin offering and their burnt offering before the Lord? But [if tragic events] like these had befallen me, and if I had eaten a sin offering today, would it have pleased the Lord?" 20 Moshe heard [this], and it pleased him.</p>	<p>(א) ויקחו בני־אהרן נדב ואביהוא איש מחתתו ויתנו בהן אש וישומו עליה קטרת ויקריבו לפני יקוק אש זרה אשר לא צוה אתם: (ב) ותצא אש מלפני יקוק ותאכל אותם וימתו לפני יקוק: (ג) ויאמר משה אל־אהרן הוא אשר־דבר יקוקו לאמר בקרבי אקדש ועל־פני כלהעם אפבד וידם אהרן: (ד) ויקרא משה אל־מישאל ואל אלצפן בני עזיאל דד אהרן ויאמר אליהם קרבו שאו את־אחיכם מאת פני־הקדש אל־מחוץ למחנה: (ה) ויקרבו וישאם בכנתם אל־מחוץ למחנה כאשר דבר משה: (ו) ויאמר משה אל־אהרן ולא לעזר ולא לתרעו ובגדיכם לא־תפרמו ולא תמתו ועל כלהעדה יקצף ואחיכם כל־בית ישראל יבכו את־השרפה אשר שרף יקוק: (ז) ומפתח אהל מועד לא תצאו פת־מתו פני־שמן משחת יקוק עליכם ויעשו כדבר משה: (ח) וידבר יקוק אל־אהרן לאמר: (ט) יין ושכר אל־תשתו אתה ובניך אתך בבאכם אל־אהל מועד ולא תמתו חקת עולם לדרתכם: (י) ולהבדיל בין הקדש ובין החל ובין הטמא ובין הטהור: (יא) ולהורת את־בני ישראל את כלהחקים אשר דבר יקוק אליהם ביד־משה: טז ואת שְׁעִיר החטאת דרש דרש משה והנה שרף ויקצף על־אלעזר ועל־איתמר בני אהרן הנותרם לאמר: יז מדוע לא־אכלתם את־החטאת במקום הקדש כי קדש קדשים הוא ואתה נתן לכם לשאת את־עון העדה לכפר עליהם לפני ה' יח הן לא־הובא את־דמה אל־הקדש פנימה אכול תאכלו אתה בקדש כאשר צויתי: יט וידבר אהרן אל־משה הן היום הקריבו את־חטאתם ואת־עלתם לפני ה' ותקראנה אתי כאלה ואכלתי חטאת היום היטב בעיני ה' כ וישמע משה</p>

	נִיטָב בְּעֵינָיו:
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Rashi on Vayikra 10:2-3	רש"י על ויקרא י:ב-ג
<p>And fire went forth: Rabbi Eliezer says: Aaron's sons died only because they rendered halachic decisions in the presence of Moses, their teacher. Rabbi Ishmael says: They died because they had entered the sanctuary after having drunk wine. The proof is that after their death, the Torah admonished the survivors that they may not enter the sanctuary after having drunk wine. This is what the Lord spoke: But when did He speak? "And I will meet with the children of Israel, and it will be sanctified through My glory (בְּכְבוֹדִי)" (Shemot 29:43). Do not read בְּכְבוֹדִי, "through My glory," but בְּמִכְבְּדֵי, "through My honorable ones." Moses said to Aaron, "Aaron, my brother! I knew that this House was to be sanctified through the beloved ones of the Omnipresent, but I thought it would be either through me or through you. Now I see that they were greater than I or you!"</p>	<p>ותצא אש: רבי אליעזר אומר לא מתו בני אהרן אלא על ידי שהורו הלכה בפני משה רבן. רבי ישמעאל אומר שתויי יין נכנסו למקדש, תדע שאחר מיתתן הזהיר הנותרים שלא יכנסו שתויי יין למקדש. הוא אשר דבר וגו': היכן דבר ונועדתי שמה לבני ישראל ונקדש בכבודי (שמות כט מג). אל תקרי בכבודי אלא במכובדי. אמר לו משה לאהרן אהרן אחי יודע הייתי שיתקדש הבית במיודעיו של מקום והייתי סבור או בי או בך, עכשיו רואה אני שהם גדולים ממני וממך:</p>

Rambam on Pirkei Avot 3:2:2	רמב"ם פרקי אבות ג:ב:ב
<p>From where is there proof that that even when there is only one person sitting, etc: In the first chapter of Berakhot 6a, it states in this language: And from where is it derived that one who sits and engages in Torah, the Divine Presence is with him? As it is stated: "In every place where I cause My Name to be mentioned, I will come to you and bless you" (Exodus 20:21)...And the explanation of "he is silent (vayidom)" as being from the hidden speech is from "a still (demamah) small voice" (I Kings 19:12). And from this did Onkelos' translation explain, "And Aharon was silent" (Leviticus 10:3) as "And Aharon praised". And his proof that he is like one that observed the entire Torah completely is from his saying, "since he takes it on himself" (Lamentations 3:28), it is as if the giving of the Torah was only for his sake.</p>	<p>מנין שאפילו אחד שיושב וכו'. בפ' קמא דברכות אומר בזה הלשון מנין לאחד שיושב ועוסק בתורה ששכינה עמו שנאמר בכל המקום אשר אזכיר את שמי אבא אליך וברכתיך... ופירוש וידום מן הדבור הנסתר מקול דממה דקה וממנו פי' התרגום וידום אהרן ושתיק אהרן וראייתו שהוא כמי שקיים כל התורה כולה מאמרו כי נטל עליו כאלו נתינת התורה כולו היתה בעבורו לבד:</p>

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Between Hope and Humanity (Shemini 5779)
<p>Without going into the details of these exchanges, their psychology is enthralling. Moses tries to comfort his brother, who has lost two of his sons. He tells him that God has said, "Among those who are near to Me, I will show Myself holy." According to Rashi, he said, "Now I see that they [Nadav and Avihu] were greater than you and me." The holier the person, the more</p>

God demands of them. It is as if Moses said to Aaron: "My brother, do not give up now. We have come so far. We have climbed so high. I know your heart is broken. So is mine. Did we not think - you and I - that our troubles were behind us, that after all we suffered in Egypt, and at the Red Sea, and in the battle against Amalek, and in the sin of the Golden Calf, we were finally safe and free? And now this has happened. Aaron, don't give up, don't lose faith, don't despair. Your children died not because they were evil but because they were holy. Though their act was wrong, their intentions were good. They merely tried too hard." But despite Moses' words of consolation, "Aaron remained silent," lost in a grief too deep for words.

In the second exchange, Moses is concerned with something else - the community, whose sins should have been atoned for by the sin offering. It is as if he had said to Aaron: "My brother, I know you are in a state of grief. But you are not just a private person. You are also the High Priest. The people need you to perform your duties, whatever your inner feelings." Aaron replies: "Would the Lord have been pleased if I had eaten the sin offering today?" We can only guess at the precise import of these words. Perhaps they mean this: "I know that in general, a High Priest is forbidden to mourn as if he were an ordinary individual. That is the law, and I accept it. But had I acted on this inaugural day as if nothing had happened, as if my sons had not died, would this not seem to the people as if I were heartless, as if human life and death meant nothing, as if the service of God meant a renunciation of my humanity?" This time, Moses is silent. Aaron is right, and Moses knows it.

In this exchange between two brothers, a momentous courage is born: the courage of an Aaron who has the strength to grieve and not accept any easy consolation, and the courage of a Moses who has the strength to keep going in spite of grief. It is almost as if we are present at the birth of an emotional configuration that will characterise the Jewish people in centuries to come. Jews are a people who have had more than their share of suffering. Like Aaron, they did not lose their humanity. They did not allow their sense of grief to be dulled, deadened, desensitised. But neither did they lose their capacity to continue, to carry on, to hope. Like Moses, they never lost faith in God. But like Aaron, they never allowed that faith to anaesthetise their feelings, their human vulnerability.

That, it seems to me, is what happened to the Jewish people after the Holocaust. There were, and are, no words to silence the grief or end the tears. We may say - as Moses said to Aaron - that the victims were innocent, holy, that they died *al kiddush Hashem*, "in sanctification of God's name." Surely that is true. Yet nonetheless, "Aaron remained silent." When all the explanations and consolations have been given, grief remains, unassuaged. We would not be human were it otherwise. That, surely, is the message of the book of Job. Job's comforters were pious in their intentions, but God preferred Job's grief to their vindication of tragedy.

Yet, like Moses, the Jewish people found the strength to continue, to reaffirm hope in the face of despair, life in the presence of death. A mere three years after coming eye to eye with the Angel of Death, the Jewish people, by establishing the State of Israel, made the single most powerful affirmation in two thousand years that *Am Yisrael Chai*, the Jewish people lives.

Moses and Aaron were like the two hemispheres of the Jewish brain: human emotion on the one hand, faith in God, the covenant, and the future on the other. Without the second, we would have lost our hope. Without the first, we would have lost our humanity. It is not easy to keep that balance, that tension. Yet it is essential. Faith does not render us invulnerable to tragedy but it gives us the strength to mourn and then, despite everything, to carry on.

