

## Torah Talk – מאמרי תורה



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Parashat Shemini  
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פרשת שמיו  
כ"ט בניסן תשע"ח

Torah Reading: *Vayikra* (Leviticus) 9:1-11:47

After the dedication of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) and the ordination of the *cohanim* (priests), two of Aharon's sons bring a strange fire before God and are consumed by fire; God then instructs Moshe and Aharon regarding which animals, fish, and birds may be eaten by the Bnei Yisrael.

This *parasha* relates the story of the death of two of Aharon's sons (10:1-3):

א וַיִּקְחוּ בְנֵי-אַהֲרֹן נָדָב וַאֲבִיהוּא אִישׁ מִחֶתֶתוֹ, וַיִּתְּנוּ בָהֶן אֵשׁ, וַיִּשְׂימוּ עָלֶיהָ, קֶטֶרֶת; וַיִּקְרִיבוּ לִפְנֵי ה', אֵשׁ זָרָה--אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוָּה, אֱתָם. ב וַתֵּצֵא אֵשׁ מִלִּפְנֵי ה', וַתֹּאכַל אוֹתָם; וַיָּמָתוּ, לִפְנֵי ה'. ג וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-אַהֲרֹן, הוּא אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר ה' לֵאמֹר בְּקֶרְבִּי אֶקְדֹּשׁ, וְעַל-פְּנֵי כָל-הָעָם, אֶכָּבֵד; וַיִּדָּם, אַהֲרֹן.

1 And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aharon, took each of them his censer, and put fire therein, and laid incense thereon, and offered strange fire before Hashem, which Hashem had not commanded them. 2 And there came forth fire from before Hashem, and devoured them, and they died before Hashem. 3 Then Moshe said to Aharon: 'This is it that Hashem spoke, saying: Through them that are near to Me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.' And Aharon was silent.

The phrase used for "Aharon was silent" is "וַיִּדָּם אַהֲרֹן – *vayidom Aharon*," which is unusual. The more common term for "silent" is שקט – *sheket* or לשתוק – *lishtok*. And in other places in the Torah a totally different form of "to remain silent" is used: להחריש – *l'hacharish*. This appears, for example, in Chapter 14 of *Shemot* (Exodus), when the Bnei Yisrael are exiting Egypt, and Moshe tells them, "ה', וְלָחֵם לָכֶם; " – *cherish* – God will fight for you and you will remain silent." תַּחַרְשׁוּן –

is the Hebrew word for someone who cannot hear and therefore cannot speak. In other words, in this case, Moshe is saying that Hashem's process of fighting for you against the Egyptians will actually render you speechless.

In the case in our *parasha*, Aharon is perfectly able to speak, so there must be something different and unusual about this silence. Why does the text use the word *vayidom*?

There is a type of silence which is just an absence of sound. If we are not speaking, we are silent. There is another kind of silence which is a withholding of sound, even when one is capable of speaking and wants to speak. This silence is a refraining from forming the desired sound or articulating one's thought. It is this active silence that is *vayidom*. The verb root appears in the *Hallel* prayer which we recite every *Rosh Chodesh* and *chag*: “לֹא הַמֵּתִים יְהַלְלוּ יְ-הוָה וְלֹא כָל יוֹרְדֵי דוּמָה” – the dead do not praise Hashem nor do all who go down into *dumah* [silence].” Those who pass would want to praise Hashem, but withhold their praise during their physical demise, as contrasted with us, who praise Hashem vigorously and loudly during *Hallel*.

So Aharon was actively silent. This is perhaps a good lesson for us at times when we want to or actually do speak words which we immediately regret. Anger, grief, and jealousy are but three states in which we, like Aharon, may want to consider remaining דומ – *dom* – actively silent.

Shabbat shalom.

For Discussion:

- Why do you think Aharon remained quiet? If you were Aharon, what would you have wanted to do or say at this time?
- Why is the phrase “before Hashem” repeated three times in this section? What is the Torah trying to teach us?