



Parashat Shemini

The deaths of *Aharon HaKohein's* sons, *Nadav* and *Avihu*, who offered a foreign fire which *Hashem* had not commanded, appear in the Torah four times. Certainly the Torah wishes us to contemplate this episode and to analyze it in depth, as this *parasha* is essentially relevant to every one of us. We will attempt, in the course of this *dvar Torah*, to understand this episode from the perspective of the father, *Aharon HaKohein*, who lost his two sons, *Nadav* and *Avihu*.

Aharon's reaction to the deaths of his sons, the Torah tells us, is silence: "*vayidom Aharon*" (*VaYikra* 10:3). The *midrash* (quoted in the *Torah Shleimah* footnote 24) explains: "The Torah didn't say '*vayishtok Aharon*,' which would indicate refraining from speaking and crying, but '*vayidom Aharon*,' indicating emotional calm and spiritual tranquility. How are we to understand *Aharon's* spiritual tranquility despite the deaths of two of his sons?"

Immediately after the Torah informs us of *Aharon's* reaction, the Torah says that *Hashem* taught *Aharon* the law that a *kohein* may not drink wine when he comes to perform the *Avodah*. Rashi explains that this was *Aharon's* reward for his silence. In other words, according to Rashi, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* gave *Aharon* special *chizuk* for his reaction to his sons' deaths by speaking to *Aharon* alone and not, as He usually did, by speaking to *Moshe* and *Aharon* together or to *Moshe* alone. The question that arises, however, is that the *parasha* which *Hashem* teaches *Aharon* basically comes to warn the *kohein* doing the *Avodah* that if he comes to the *Beit HaMikdash* after drinking wine, he will die! Is this the *chizuk* that one gives to a person who has just lost two sons? "Be careful or else you and your other two sons will die too"? What is the meaning behind Rashi's comment that this *parasha* was *Aharon's* reward for his silence?

These questions lead us to the topic of *shtikah* (silence). *Shtikah* generally indicates one of two things: 1) Fear, such as when a person who is yelled at remains silent; or 2) acquiescence, as in *shtikah k'hoda'ah*, when one person claims money from another and the latter is silent, essentially admitting that he owes the claimant money. *Aharon HaKohein* teaches us that *shtikah* can indicate something else as well. We can understand this third type of *shtikah* from the following *gemara*: When *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* showed *Moshe Rabbeinu* the true greatness of *R' Akiva*, *Moshe Rabbeinu* asked *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, "If You have such a great person, why don't You give the Torah through him?" *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* responded, "*Shtok*, be silent!" *Moshe* continued, asking to see *R' Akiva's* reward for his Torah. *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* showed *Moshe* the markets of Rome, where *R' Akiva's* flesh was being weighed and sold. *Moshe* challenged, "This is the Torah and this is its reward?!" *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* again responded, "*Shtok!* This is what I have decided" (*Menachot* 29b). What kind of response is "*Shtok!*"? How does that answer the question? Rather, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* was teaching *Moshe* that there are things that one can understand only if one sees the entire picture. This can only be done when one is silent, because when one speaks, one concentrates only on what he's saying, ignoring the surroundings. *Shtikah* allows one to evaluate his surroundings and to see the entire picture.

R' Akiva teaches us this lesson in *Pirkei Avot* as well: *Masoret seyag laTorah*, One who follows the tradition will most likely follow the Torah as well (but there is no guarantee). *Ma'asrot seyag l'osher*, One who gives tithes will most likely become wealthy (but, again, there is no guarantee). In

his conclusion, however, *R' Akiva* strays from his template, teaching: *Seyag lachochmah, shtikah*, Silence leads one to wisdom, instead of *shtikah seyag lachochmah*. Unlike following tradition and giving tithes, which are like *segulos*, so to speak, *shtikah* is a **guarantee** for *chochmah*, because through *shtikah* one is able to perceive the entire picture.

This was the greatness of *Aharon's* silence. His silence doesn't represent emotional coldness, for he certainly cried over the loss of his two sons. Rather, *Aharon* had the *ma'alah* (positive trait) of *shtikah*, which let him see the entire picture, enabling him to accept the deaths of his sons with tranquility and love for Hashem. This is essentially a *halacha* in the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* §222), which rules that one must have a tranquil frame of mind and full desire when blessing *Hashem* for the bad just as one has when blessing Him for the good, because when bad things happen to those who serve *Hashem*, they accept it with love.

One who has the *ma'alah* of *shtikah* can discover great *sodot* (secrets), because the whole point of a *sod* is that it remains a *sod*. *Aharon's* silence demonstrated his mastery of the trait of *shtikah*, and thus, his unique ability to uncover *sodot*. As he began his career in the *Beit HaMikdash*, where he would be privy to the *sod* of Creation and to all sorts of other *sodot*, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* warns him not to drink wine, because "*Nichnas yayin yatza sod*, When wine comes in, secrets come out." *Yayin* in *gematria* is the same as *sod*. This commandment is not a warning that *Aharon* may die too, but rather an emphasis of *Aharon's* intimacy with *sod*. We now understand how this *parasha* served as a source of *chizuk* to *Aharon HaKohein*, essentially praising him as the paradigm of "*Sod Hashem li'y'reiav, Hashem* shares His secrets with those who fear Him" (*Tehillim* 25:14).

The concept of *shtikah* relates to all of us. No matter how often we become angry, rightfully or otherwise, if we possess the skill of *shtikah*, remaining silent until we have calmed down, we will always be happy in hindsight that we did not react immediately. *Shtikah* has the power to prevent *machloket*, to prevent anger, and to allow one to see the greater picture. The *ma'alah* of *shtikah* allows us to consider the whole situation, and to weigh our reaction with the proper balance rather than reacting impulsively. Through *shtikah* we arrive at *chochmah*. *Chochmah*, which allows us to see the whole picture, leads to *binah*, understanding one thing from another, and to *da'at*, incorporating our experiences into our personalities. Thus we elevate our lives, individual and communal, to new heights.

Shabbat Shalom!
Meir Goldwicht

Rav Meir Goldwicht's weekly sichah on the Parsha and Moadim is a service of YUTorah, the online source of the Torah of Yeshiva University. Get more parsha shiurim and thousands of other shiurim, by visiting www.yutorah.org.