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And Aaron was silent (10:3)

Because Aaron was silent, he was rewarded that G-d spoke exclusively to him [see below, verses 8-11; ordinarily G-d spoke to Aaron only in conjunction with—or through—Moses]. [Midrash Rabbah]

Said Rav Papa: The merit of attending a house of mourning lies in the silence observed. [Talmud, Berachot 6b]

In youth, one learns to talk; in maturity, one learns to be silent. This is man's problem: that he learns to talk before he learns to be silent. [Rabbi Nachman of Breslav]

Speech signifies comprehensibility. Melody is beyond language, expressing moods which words cannot describe. Silence is yet higher. The power to be silent at certain moments of life and of history is an important strength. It expresses the awareness that G-d is infinite, and cannot be encapsulated in our human conceptions of what should take place.

The Talmud tells of an instance in which Moses himself was told by G-d to be silent. G-d showed him in a vision all future generations of the Jewish people, and the leaders of each generation. Moses was greatly impressed by the wisdom of Rabbi Akiva. Then he saw the way the Romans tortured him to death. "Is this the reward of his Torah knowledge?" Moses asked. G-d answered: "Be silent. Thus it arose in My thought".

This is not to say that the Torah advocates a fatalistic approach to life. Before the event, one must do everything possible to prevent tragedy. But once it has happened, G-d forbid, through the acceptance and the silence we reach a special closeness to the Divine. Our Sages tell us that because Aaron was silent, he was rewarded by G-d speaking directly to him.

In our generation, too, there is a need for this power of silence. It is not a passive power, but one that leads to vigorous and joyous action. The Jewish response to the harrowing events of the Shoah is the determined and energetic action to rebuild Jewish family life and Jewish knowledge.

Through our power of silence we too, like Aaron, will merit Divine revelation. G-d will bring the Messiah, rebuilding the Temple and bringing lasting peace to the world. [The Lubavitcher Rebbe] (chabadonline.com)

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And it came to pass on the eighth day (9:1) The number seven represents the cycle of creation; the number eight represents the "circumference"—that which lies beyond the perimeter of time and space. This is why the Divine Presence came to dwell in the Israelite camp on the eighth day. This is also alluded to in the saying of our sages (Talmud, Erchin 13b) that "The lyre of Moshiah has eight strings." (Keli Yakar; Shaloh) (chabadonline.com)

"If any of these fall on the inside of a clay vessel, then anything inside it becomes unclean, and the vessel itself shall be broken" [11:33] Man can be compared to a clay vessel. With man, too, the main aspect is the inner: his mind and heart. Therefore, he too becomes impure primarily from the "inside": his thoughts and feelings. Otzair Chayim [translated from Sichat HaShavua 484] (www.ascent.org.il)

MONOTHEISM

In the summer of 1920 I was summoned to the Tcheka - the name GPU was not yet in use at the time - of Rostov-on-the-Don. The summons was carried out by the Judaism-hating "Jewish section" of the communist party, the infamous Yevsektzia.

The summons was typical to the manner of the Tcheka. I had not yet concluded the morning prayers (I was leading the prayers myself, for it was within the year of mourning after my holy father's passing) when the three emissaries from the court of death entered the room - dressed in their uniforms of red and black, rifles in hand, their belts filled with bullets and hung with a pair of revolvers and another pair of Cossack knives, with helmets of brass and their faces aflame. They approached me and said: "You are summoned to immediately accompany us to the offices of the Tcheka."

Two of the messengers were from the Yevsektzia and the third a non-Jew. The two Jews wished to strip me of my tallit and tefillin on the spot. When I told them that I must first finish my prayers - we were at the Monday supplement Vehu Rachum - and the study of mishnayot which follows, they let loose a barrage of curses and yelled at me to remove my tallit and tefillin immediately. (Incidentally, one of them was a refugee from the city of Shavel who had come to me for assistance. I had arranged a position for him at a cigarette business and later I had loaned him money to establish a business of his own. For the next three years - up until the revolution - he earned a respectable living.) Were it not for the intervention of their non-Jewish colleague, they would have forcefully interrupted my prayers.

When I finished reciting the final kaddish which follows the study of mishnayot, I removed my tallit and tefillin and went along with my armed guardians. One walked on my right, a second on my left, and a third behind me - in the manner that those accused of treason against the regime are led.

When we arrived at the courtyard of death, they led me to a large chamber in which some fifteen persons sat along both sides of a long table. At the head of the table sat another two, and I was seated opposite them at the foot of the table. My three guards sat behind me, left, right, and center.

One of those seated at the head of the table addressed me: "We are the members of the Party's Committee to Investigate Religions, now occupied in investigating the Jewish religion. We have various questions. We have already summoned Rabbi Berman and Rabbi Goldenberg - we asked what we asked and they answered what they answered. Now we have summoned Rabbi Schneerson to resolve certain issues pertaining to Kabbalah and Chassidism."

All this was said in the Russian language.

I answered in Yiddish: "I have already made it clear on the two former occasions on which I was summoned to the Tcheka that I will not budge from my principles. There is yet to be born and never will there be born, the man or demon who will move me in the slightest degree from my principles..."

Before I finished my words I was interrupted by a "committee member" seated on the right side of the table. He lifted the revolver which lay on the table - in addition to the arms which they all wore on their belts, a revolver lay on the table before each of the assembled - and pointed it at me, saying: "This toy does away with 'principles'. Fear of it has opened many a mouth. Also the dumb have become talkative before it."

"You are utterly mistaken," I replied. "This toy impresses only the cowardly atheist, who has but a single world and many gods (ein velt un asach getter) - every hedonist has his many gods. But as for us, who have but a single G-d and believe in two worlds, the toy which you are brandishing not only fails to frighten, it makes no impression whatsoever." From the memoirs of the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson (chabadonline.com)

CHASSIDIM ASKED THE ALTER REBBE:

"WHICH IS THE SUPERIOR AVODA, LOVE OF G-D OR LOVE OF ISRAEL?" HE REPLIED: "BOTH LOVE OF G-D AND LOVE OF ISRAEL ARE EQUALLY ENGRAVED IN EVERY JEW'S NESHAMA, RUACH, AND NEFESH. (1) SCRIPTURE IS EXPLICIT: 'I HAVE LOVED YOU, SAYS THE L-RD.' (2) IT FOLLOWS THAT LOVE OF ISRAEL IS SUPERIOR - FOR YOU LOVE WHOM YOUR BELOVED LOVES."

FOOTNOTES: 1. DIFFERENT LEVELS OR ASPECTS OF THE SOUL. THE TWO LOVES THOROUGHLY PERMEATE THE SOUL ON EVERY LEVEL. 2. MALACHI 1:2. (FROM REBBE'S HAYOM YOM NISAN 28)

Each of us has deficiencies, but as a whole we are complete. Each one is perfected by his fellow, until we make a perfect whole.

Be Within, Stay Above - More meditations from the wisdom of the Rebbe