

10:1-3:

Now Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu each took his fire pan, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered before יהוה alien fire, which had not been enjoined upon them.

And fire came forth from יהוה and consumed them; thus they died before Hashem.

Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what Hashem meant by saying:

Through those near to Me I show Myself holy,

And gain glory before all the people."

Vayidom Aharon - And Aaron was silent.

Rashi:

Moses here said to Aaron: "My brother, Aaron! I knew that this House was to be sanctified by those who are beloved of the Omnipresent God and I thought it would be either through me or through thee; now I see that these (thy sons who have died) are greater than me and than thee!" (Leviticus Rabbah 12 2).

וידם אהרן AND AARON WAS SILENT — He received a reward for his silence. And what was the reward he received? That the subsequent Divine address was made to him alone and not to Moses also

Sforno: Vayidom Aharon: seeing he consoled himself after having been told that the death of his sons represented a sanctification of the name of the Lord.

Rashbam: Moshe's lines are not explanatory but instructive – this is what happens next by not leaving the holy precincts at this time Aaron did in fact sanctify the name of the Lord. This is the meaning of בקרובי אקדש, "I will be sanctified by those close to Me." The fact that the legislation we just quoted appears only in chapter 21 is no argument as the Torah is not bound to record its message to the Jewish people in chronological sequence. At any rate, Moses told Aaron not to abandon the service in the Tabernacle while in circumstances which imposed mourning on other priests, even.

Ramban: שהיה בוכה בקול ואז שתק

Abrbanel: ...His heart became like an inanimate (domem) rock, and he did not raise his voice in crying or eulogy, as would a father for [his] children; he also did not accept condolences from Moses. For he had no breath left in him, nor did he have any speech...

Karalyn Benger writes, "Now we understand Aaron's silence may not be a form of grief but a forced stoicism. A trauma on top of trauma. Either Aaron was silenced in his grief or he was silenced from it. Neither offers us any consolation. . . .

The death of Nadab and Abihu certainly struck Aaron. We see his grief in his silent, stoic mourning, in that space beyond pain. We cannot comfort him nor can we offer a reason why his sons died. But we can stand with him each year, in his silence, and we can try to understand the meaning of their life and what it means to us."

The question of how we mourn, how we make meaning out of grief is especially live for me this Shabbat, 6th months after the October 7th attack, 6 months into a horrific war that has killed so many innocents.

Of course, I do not want to compare Hamas's attack to the quintessentially inscrutable divine act described in this Torah portion: we truly do not know what it means that fire from hashem consumed Nadav and Abihu." The acts of Oct 7th were not an act of God.

However, the questions that the death of Nadav and Avihu raise are still questions for us: what meaning do we make from shocking grief?

Aharon's silence reminds us that rushing to make meaning is not always the right choices. Sometimes we need space to bear witness to the pain. Aharon has a right to be silent. Perhaps it is a caution to us to avoid the urge to rush into covering our mourning with words, with meaning making.