

Korach

The Sound of Faith

They gathered against Moshe and against Aaron...Moshe heard and fell on his face.

Bamidbar 16:3–4

Moshe had been chosen by Hashem. There was nothing that Korach and his cronies could do about that. But Aaron's appointment as the Kohen bothered them, explains Ramban. Thus, their attack was against both Moshe and Aaron; it was an attack on Aaron's position, and on Moshe's authority to appoint him. In reality, it was Hashem Who had appointed Aaron, and Moshe was just the agent, but these men disputed that. The Torah tells us Moshe's response to the attack on his brother: he fell on his face. But Aaron's response is never mentioned! Ramban¹ explains that this is because Aaron never responded. "For Aaron, in his refined and holy manner, never replied at all during the entire altercation. He was silent, as though admitting that Korach was, in fact, greater than he."

This was not the first time Aaron remained silent. When two of his sons died, the Torah tells us that Aaron remained silent,² with no questions about Hashem's ways. What is the meaning of this? Why is silence the appropriate response in the face of disappointment? Why did Aaron not stand up for himself, and tell Korach off?

"He who is humiliated, but does not humiliate in return; who hears himself degraded and does not reply; who acts out of love and rejoices in his tribulations – regarding him, the verse says, 'Those who love Him are like the sun rising in its power.'³"⁴ The word for the sun's rising is "*tzais*," which literally means "leaving."

The sun, our Sages teach,⁵ is always seeking to go to the west, "where the Divine Presence is."⁶ The entire world does the bidding of Hashem. The planets orbit only because that is His will. Every natural phenomenon is doing no more than bowing toward Hashem. It is for this reason, explains the Yismach Moshe,⁷ that the rising of the sun is referred to as "the leaving of the sun," and its setting is called "the arrival of the sun." When the sun has finally made it to the west, where it sets, it has finally made it to the side of the Divine Presence. When we talk about the rising of the sun as leaving its place, we are really saying that the sun works for a higher Master than us. We are only a stop on the sun's way to fulfilling the divine will. The

1 Bamidbar 16:4

2 Vaykira 10:3

3 Shoftim 5:31

4 Shabbos 88b

5 Sanhedrin 91b

6 See Bava Basra 25a

7 Parshas Beshalach

light that shines on us is sent by Hashem, via the sun. The sun has left Hashem, as it were, but its goal is just to do His will, and “bow to Him,” in the west.

R. Moshe Wolfson⁸ explains that this is the why the fellow who remains silent is compared to the sun. The fact that the sun’s interaction with our world is looked upon as it “leaving” its ideal place is really reflective of the way that we look at this world. This world is only temporary. The fellow who is capable of rejoicing in this world despite suffering is one who does not see this world as the ultimate end. He is therefore able to remain silent in the face of pain. The sun, too, sees this world as temporary, and thus, its real goal is only to make it to the west. This man has acted like the rising sun.

We are meant to bless Hashem the same way when good things happen as when bad things happen. The Talmud⁹ teaches us that “the essential difference between this world and the World to Come [after the world is perfected, in the messianic era]” is that “in this world, when good things happen, we bless Hashem, ‘Who is good and does good,’ but when bad things happen, we bless Hashem as ‘the true Judge.’ In the next world, we will always bless Hashem as the One ‘Who is good and does good.’”

In our world, when something happens that we see as bad, we make a blessing. But it is not a blessing of happiness; it is a blessing of silence. We understand that this world is not the final world. In that world, we will know only good, and we will see the good in everything. But the very nature of life in this world requires that we not see things with that same clarity. The proper response, Aaron teaches us, is to remain silent – to know with certainty that this world and its events are being arranged by the Great Creator and Arranger. Certainly, we cannot feign happiness when we are sad. But we can internalize the ultimate message that Hashem is sending us. We were put into a world where clarity is a rare commodity. It is not usually possible to see the real nature of things, or to understand why things are happening. Not seeing God is what makes connecting to Him such an accomplishment. It is why we are here.

When we can remain silent in the face of difficulty, we ingrain in ourselves that this world is temporal, and that there is a larger picture. The troubles that one experiences in this world are valuable experiences.

King David wrote,¹⁰ “From amidst kindness and justice, I sing...” David accepted his tribulations with love, and sang to Hashem as a result of them.¹¹ It was not *despite* his tribulations that he sang to Hashem; David’s silence led him to song, for even strict justice was just another manifestation of Hashem’s love for him, and David could find no reason to

8 *Emunas Ittecha*, vol. 1, p. 314, Likkutim. See Meiri to Gittin 36b, s.v. *liolam*, where he explains this statement based upon Chullin 60b, where the Gemara speaks of how the sun remained silent in the face of the moon’s demands that the two not share one crown. The same can be found in *Tos. Harosh* to Shabbos 88b, s.v. *aleibem*. See, however, the comments of Ritva to Yoma 23a.

9 Pesachim 50a

10 Tehillim 101:1

11 This is the explanation of Chida in *Yosef Tebillos*, ad loc.

cease his song.

When we are faced with troubles, Hashem desires that we accept them as His will. We are to go on with our lives in this temporary existence with the full realization that we are in the hands of Hashem, and that this world's vicissitudes are not all that significant. Aaron teaches us that silence in the face of adversity is truly the sound of faith.