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THE GREATNESS OF KIDDUSH HASHEM

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita)

Our parsha deals with the greatness of Aaron. After the death of Nadav and Avihu, it is written: “And Aaron was silent” (Leviticus 10:3). This means that by his silence he concurred with their sentence and demonstrated to everyone that G-d was justified in taking the lives of his two sons. This occurred on the very day that he was established as High Priest, the day of his heart’s content, the day of Hashem’s joy, and the day that he received 10 crowns (Torat Kohanim 9:1). This was the day that the entire world awaited since creation, the day when G-d would finally establish His dwelling place in this world.

Apparently, Aaron could have questioned G-d as to why He killed his two sons, for they were righteous men and they had only acted for the sake of Heaven and to get closer to G-d. And even if they had decided a Halachah before their teachers (Eruvin 63a), it was not really their goal to do so, therefore how did it matter? The Children of Israel could have also questioned G-d about this, but when they saw that Aaron was silent and had accepted His decree, they concluded that there was no reason to protest.

This is why silence was precisely the way in which G-d’s Name was sanctified in public. It is written concerning Aaron’s sons: “I will be sanctified through those who are nearest Me” (Leviticus 10:3), and this occurred when Aaron confirmed G-d’s judgment, aware that everything the Merciful One does is for the good (Berachot 60b), and that G-d admonishes those He loves (Proverbs 3:12). Moses said to Aaron, “I thought that G-d would sanctify Himself through myself or you. Now I know that they [Nadav and Avihu] were greater and holier than you or I” (Tanhuma Shemini 1). Aaron’s silence thus proved that his soul clung to G-d. When Aaron kept silent, he sanctified G-d’s Name in the eyes of all the Children of Israel, for everyone saw that he accepted His decision. If Aaron had protested, he would have brought about a desecration of G-d’s Name, whereas on the contrary he actually sanctified it in public.

Aaron’s two sons thus merited resembling Isaac: In the same way that G-d recalls the ashes of Isaac, which are before His eyes on Yom Kippur (Vayikra Rabba 36:5), He recalls the death of Aaron’s two sons, through whom His Name was sanctified. [It is, moreover, thanks to them that the Children of Israel merited having Yom Kippur, as the Rebbe of Ger once said on Shabbat Acharei Mot – Kedoshim in 5753]. Actually, whoever sanctifies G-d’s Name in public and confirms His decrees without protesting is worthy of having his merit protect his entire generation, as well as all the generations, both in this world and in the World to Come.

Consequently, the death of the righteous atones for the Children of Israel (Moed Katan 28a). This is because G-d sends them trials in life, ones they accept with love by acknowledging that they are just, and the resulting merit is such that G-d forgives the entire world because of them. In addition, they are even greater in death than during their lifetime (Chullin 7b), and they can atone for all Israel.

In writing these words, I am reminded of a visit that I once made to a young, G-d-fearing man who was ill. When I saw him, I spoke to my friend who was accompanying me and mentioned the terrible ordeal that the sick man’s family had to go through. I told him that it was precisely now that his family must control themselves and accept this pain by realizing that it is brought about by G-d’s love for them (Berachot 5a). This is a difficult thing to do, for the Satan accuses man in moments of danger (Tanhuma Vayigash 1), thus increasing the anguish in the heart of the sick man and his family. At that point they may ask themselves why he has to suffer so much, given that he observes Torah and mitzvot, and given that he is filled with faith and behaves with goodness toward others. Is this the reward of his Torah (Berachot 61b)?

They should realize that these trials are precisely trials of love – they do not come as a result of neglecting Torah study or prayer – and that G-d is fully aware of everything that is

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happening. As a result, it is precisely during these difficult times that the family, and especially the sick person, should overcome their doubts and accept this suffering with love. The sick person will then be happy to sanctify G-d's Name in public and defend what has happened to him, certain that "the L-RD admonishes the one He loves" (Proverbs 3:12) and that "the L-RD desired to oppress him and He afflicted him" (Isaiah 53:10). But unfortunately, woe to the one who profanes G-d's Name by protesting against His decrees and asking what has brought him such suffering. By this, he demonstrates that such suffering is unjust in his opinion. He should rather control himself and accept his pain with love.

We therefore see to what extent a man can help the whole world by a single instant of sanctifying G-d's Name in public, especially if he devotes his life to G-d, for then his reward will be utterly indescribable. Moreover, G-d is grateful to him and calls him "My son, the one who works for Me," as it is said concerning the Children of Israel who work for their Father in Heaven (Zohar III:7b). G-d adorns him with 10 robes (Devarim Rabba 2:26), or He delivers him from among the nations (Berachot 8a).

It is written, "Ascribe power to G-d; upon Israel is ga'avato [His pride]" (Psalms 68:35), which means that through the Children of Israel (who sanctify G-d), He is invincible and His grandeur exists not only in Heaven, but also on earth, as the verse testifies: "The L-RD has reigned, He has donned grandeur" (ibid. 93:1). Once this is accomplished, we also come to the point at which "His might is in the skies" (ibid. 68:35), above just as below. In fact, the one who sanctifies G-d's Name is like his Master's chariot, insofar as he carries and protects His honor. But woe to the one who profanes His Name, for he proves that for himself, there exists neither justice nor judge (Yoma 72a). If such a person profanes G-d's Name, be it even in secret, he is punished in public (Perkei Avoth 4:4), for he deprives his Master of His power, and because of him it is not abundance, but only misfortune that will descend upon the world. As for the person who accepts a decree by silencing himself like Aaron, he elevates G-d's Name. The word vayidom ("and he [Aaron] was silent") has the same numerical value as the words Y-H (one of G-d's Names) and adam ("man") combined, and the name Y-H has the same numerical value as the word ga'avah ("pride"). This reminds us to "Ascribe power to G-d; upon Israel is ga'avato [His pride]," for all G-d's pride only becomes evident when a man abstains from protesting against His actions and accepts His decrees with love.

We find an allusion to this concept when the Children of Israel complained against G-d by saying: "Is the L-RD among us or not?" (Exodus 17:7). They harmed His Name in so doing, for this demonstrated that they did not wholeheartedly accept what was happening to them. Immediately afterwards, "Amalek came and battled Israel" (v.8). Amalek, who had created an imperfection in the name Y-H, came to attack

Israel with all its pride. This is why G-d said, "For the hand is on the throne of Y-H: The L-RD maintains a war against Amalek" (v.16), for the damage brought about by pride must be repaired by decreasing the numerical value of Y-H (15) by one and transforming it into yad ("hand" – Numerical value: 14). Actually, the forces of evil have an influence over the Sefira of Hod (Attribute of Glory), whose numerical value is 15, signifying Y-H (Zohar III:282a). This is the meaning of, "For the hand...". As for the word kess ("throne"), there it also consists of giving it back an aleph to make kissei (the complete form of the word "throne"). Thus Y-H will be complete and once again have the value of 15, the throne will be complete, and the Sefira of Hod will be at full strength when the Kingdom of G-d reveals itself to the entire world. When will all this happen? When Amalek is defeated, for Amalek damaged all these concepts.

When Aaron kept silent and accepted what was decreed upon his sons, he annulled his very self before G-d. He also elevated the Sefira of Hod to its rightful place, for we know that this Sefira is represented by Aaron (Zohar II:276b). He too was elevated by the Sefira of Hod, for whoever flees from honor and greatness is pursued by them (Eruvin 13b). This is the meaning of "And Aaron was silent": He brought everything back to its source, and he restored G-d's grandeur back to Him, as in: "The L-RD has reigned, He has donned grandeur" (Psalms 93:1). Aaron restored G-d's Name and the Hod back to their original state.

Moreover, by Aaron's silence and his self-effacement before G-d, he brought peace to the whole world. This in fact was his primary character trait, for he loved and pursued peace (Perkei Avoth 1:12). When he saw that there was reason to accuse Israel of wrongdoing, he knew that it was because of baseless hatred, which is why he pursued peace. He did so in order to spread the Sefira of Hod and to elevate it to its rightful place, so that it not fall under the power of kelipah (impurity). His silence is also the trait that allows a person to listen to insult without protesting, and this attitude brings about the restoration of the Sefira and the Name of G-d.

Aaron's silence therefore had many positive effects: He sanctified G-d's Name, restored all its measure to Him, reinstated the Sefira of Hod to its rightful place, brought peace to the world, and achieved the perfection of all Klal Israel. Thus his silence brought merit to his sons Nadav and Avihu, and without it the ensuing damage would have been extensive. Yet because he kept quiet, this virtue helped his sons and G-d's Name was sanctified through them. The accuser was also reduced to silence, and both the Sefira of Hod (specific to Aaron) and G-d's Name were rectified. As for Nadav and Avihu, they spiritually elevated themselves and attained the place that was their due for having sanctified G-d's Name in public

IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM RABBI NISSIM SHAMAMA

Rabbi Nissim Shamama was loved and respected by all. As the finance minister of the king of Tunis, he strived to help all those in need, especially Torah scholars. He helped them to publish their books, even though printing at that time was very difficult. His heart and hands were always open and ready to help anyone in need, and whoever was poor could expect to be offered a sizable amount of money by his generous heart.

Rabbi Nissim enjoyed the respect of the king, who trusted the exemplary wisdom with which Rabbi Nissim managed the kingdom's finances. His position made him famous, but just as his friends were numerous, so too were his enemies, who were jealous of his position and wanted to get rid of him.

One day some of his enemies slandered him to the king, who in his gullibility believed them. Without the least bit of inquiry, the king condemned Rabbi Nissim to death. This decree quickly became known, and Rabbi Nissim set out to leave the country. However he could not find his passport, and it remained lost despite an extensive search.

Rabbi Nissim was a regular at the home of the Gaon Rabbi Avraham Cohen Itzchak, the author of Mishmerot Kehuna. He was his faithful disciple and saw to everything he needed. Now that his fate had turned, he was convinced that Rabbi Avraham would be his defender and savior.

Rabbi Nissim went to see his teacher and recounted how the king had condemned him to death because of his jealous enemies. He also told him that he could not find his passport, for perhaps someone had taken it from him. With a calm and confident voice, Rabbi Avraham tried to reassure him, and after reflecting upon the matter he advised him to assemble a minyan to study Tikkun HaLaila. By the merit of this study and his good deeds, he told him, he would find his passport and succeed in fleeing the country.

That same night, Rabbi Nissim assembled a minyan of Torah scholars at his home to fervently study Tikkun HaLaila and Torah. After all, does the Torah not protect a person from all harm?

At dawn the Torah scholars went home one by one, and Rabbi Nissim decided to go see Rabbi Avraham. As he was about to leave, however, Rabbi Avraham had already beaten him to it and was there at his home, his face beaming.

"I asked a question and in a dream it was revealed to me that your passport is well hidden between the pages of [such and such a book] on your shelf."

Rabbi Nissim rushed towards the shelf that contained his books, excitedly took out the book in question, and found his passport inside! It was exactly where he had put it.

Because of G-d's mercy, Rabbi Nissim left Tunis before the guards at the port were told about the king's decree.

THE STORY OF THE WEEK THE REPENTANCE OF RABBI SAADIA GAON

People say that throughout his life, Rabbi Saadia Gaon Zatzal mortified himself by rolling in the snow and by performing other acts of penitence. His disciples found his behavior strange, to the extent that they asked him, "Our teacher, how can you repent? Do you sin? We know that you are a great Tzaddik, so why all this suffering?" He replied to them, "My dear students, there are two types of repentance: A person can regret his sins, or a person can regret even his mitzvot. It is for the latter that I repent, for each day I become more aware of the greatness of the Holy One, blessed be He, and each day I perfect myself more than the day before. I repent from my imperfect past, and I truly regret not having known the Holy One, blessed be He, and His Torah as I know them today!"

He continued: "I learned this from a very simple Jew. One day I found myself in a distant city, and I went to a Jew who didn't know me. Naturally, he acted with me in accordance with the mitzvah of hospitality, as he should. After a few days, some people who recognized me came by and told others that I was staying there. The entire city was buzzing with excitement, and everyone came to receive my blessing and to ask for my advice. When my host saw all this, he was overtaken by remorse, bitterly regretting that he had not welcomed me with greater honor. From that point on, he provided me with finer sheets and served me meals fit for the holidays. Despite all this, however, when I left his place he fell to my feet and begged my forgiveness: 'May our Rav forgive me for not having honored him as I should.' I told him that he had done everything he possibly could, and I thanked him very much for it. Nevertheless, he did not stop asking for my forgiveness, and I gave him my blessing."

Rabbi Saadia Gaon finished his story by saying: "From that day on, I drew a lesson from a Kal Vachomer: If a person can feel so much regret that he has not sufficiently honored a human being, how much more should a person feel regret when it comes to properly honoring the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He? And how greatly should one feel regret for the omissions of the past!"

THE MORAL OF THE STORY FROM THE MAGGID OF DUBNO

It is written: “Moses said to Aaron: Of this did the L-RD speak, saying: ‘I will be sanctified through those who are nearest Me; thus I will be honored before the entire people’ ” (Leviticus 10:3).

The Midrash states: “Rabbi Itzchak opened his discourse with the verse, ‘As soon as Your words come, I devour them. For me Your word was the joy and gladness of my heart, for Your Name was proclaimed upon me, O L-RD, G-d of Hosts’ [Jeremiah 15:16]. Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachman said, ‘These words were addressed to Moses on Sinai, and he was unaware of it until he actually needed them.’ Moses said to Aaron: ‘My brother, I was told on Sinai that later on I would be called to sanctify this House, and that I would sanctify it by a great man. I thought that this House would be sanctified through myself or you. Now I see that your two sons are greater than you or I.’ When Aaron heard that his sons had feared G-d, he kept silent and was rewarded for it.”

In order to understand the meaning of this text, we will relate it to what our Sages have said in another place: “Rabbi Yehudah opened his discourse with the verse, ‘Is it by your command that the eagle soars?’ [Job 39:27] – the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Aaron: By the word of your mouth I rested my Shechinah on the Ark of the Covenant. ‘From there he searches for food’ [v.29] – it is from there that his food comes for all the days of the year. ‘His eyes look out to the distance’ [ibid.] – from the beginning of the year he knew what would happen in the end. And after all these compliments, ‘His eaglets gulp up blood’ [v.30] – he saw his eaglets rolling in the ground, yet he kept quiet. And ‘where there are corpses, there he is’ [ibid.] – these corpses are Nadav and Avihu; the Shechinah is there.”

To explain this passage, let us illustrate with the following parable:

A great prince built a city and settled a certain number of people there. After having completed all the construction necessary for it to be as magnificent as possible, the prince had numerous wells dug in the hopes of finding water. Nevertheless this proved fruitless. He then sent for a famous craftsman so that he could perhaps find a source of water for the city, otherwise all the work would have been for nothing. The man arrived in the city and thoroughly examined the surroundings. He then said to the prince, “Your Majesty, from here I can make water spring up from the ground, which you will notice in a few days. A sign

that the source will not delay in coming is that the water will arrive with such great noise and spontaneity that it will be capable of breaching even very thick walls.” The prince responded, “I am not worried about any walls. The only thing that matters to me is that what you are saying is true, and that I have enough water to provide for the needs of the entire city.” This craftsman did what was necessary, and a few days later a jet of streaming water sprung up so violently from the ground that it became a raging river and destroyed an immense house. The owner came and threw himself at the feet of the prince and cried out, “A raging stream of water demolished my house!” The prince greatly rejoiced at this news, and he was still speaking when another came and exclaimed that his house had collapsed, then a third and a fourth person arrived with similar stories. The prince, meanwhile, was filled with joy and laughter. The people around him, however, were stunned. Was it possible that he was rejoicing over the immense loss that they had suffered? The prince answered them: “You know very well that regardless of the size of a city, even one 300 times larger than our own, it cannot survive without water. I therefore have an excellent reason for rejoicing, since the sign that was given to me has been fulfilled. I am now certain that this city will never lack water.”

The Holy One, blessed be He, ordered that a Sanctuary be built and religious articles be fashioned, and He promised to make His Shechinah reside inside. He therefore gave the following sign that this promise would be fulfilled: “I will be sanctified through those who are nearest Me” (Leviticus 10:3). Once the work had been completed and people saw the sign fulfilled (since Nadav and Avihu were dead), Aaron thought: “How my heart is glad that we had the merit of seeing our hopes realized!” This is the meaning of the Midrash when it states, “And after all these compliments, ‘His eaglets gulp up blood’ – he saw his eaglets rolling in the ground, yet he kept quiet. And ‘where there are corpses, there he is,’ ” – for the presence of Nadav and Avihu’s corpses made Aaron understand that Hashem had made His Shechinah reside in the Sanctuary. This is why in the passage, “As soon as Your words come, I devour them. For me Your word was the joy and gladness of my heart” (Jeremiah 15:16), Rabbi Itzchak saw an allusion to Aaron, for he rejoiced in realizing that the sign of G-d’s promise had been fulfilled. His joy was because “Your Name was proclaimed upon me, O L-RD, G-d of Hosts” (ibid.).