

CHUKAS

25:9) -- "The Kiss of LIFE

2004 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

The “Brothers ben-Amram” both died shortly before the Israelites entered the Land of Canaan (Israel). Moses and Aaron, the leaders of Israel, were dearly respected in their lifetimes, and sorely missed when they died:

The entire assembly saw that Aaron had perished, and the entire House of Israel wept for Aaron for thirty days. (Numbers, 20:29)... The Children of Israel wept for Moses in the fields of Moab for thirty days; then the days of weeping and mourning for Moses ended. (Deuteronomy, 34:8)

Our Sages point out a contrast between the nation's reaction to these deaths. *The **Children of Israel** wept for Moses, while **the entire House of Israel**** wept for Aaron.*

*The **Children** (literally, sons) of Israel wept for Moses. The men wept over the loss of their respected judge. **The entire House of Israel**, men and women, wept over the loss of their beloved peacemaker.*

If a husband and wife weren't getting along, Aaron the High Priest, whose job was to bless the People with peace, (see “Blessing the Blessers” and “Bless Your Heart!”) would make it his business to restore harmony to the home of this conflicting couple. Whenever Aaron heard about an argument between two people, he approached each person separately and told him how bad the other one felt about their disagreement. (This is an example of a situation when it is a Mitzvah to “stretch the truth” for the sake of peace.) As a result of his efforts, each person believed that the other person was sorry, and when they met they patched up their differences. Aaron encouraged people to love each other. In the process, he earned their love as well.

It appears that the way Aaron lived is the way he died. Together with his son Elazar and his brother Moses, he climbed a mountain and stood at the entrance of a cave. Aaron's special Priestly garments were removed and transferred to his son, the new High Priest.

Rashi describes the final moments of Aaron's life: “Moses told him, ‘Enter the cave,’ and he entered. He saw a made-up bed and a lit candle. (Moses) told him, ‘Go up onto the bed,’ and he went up. ‘Stretch out your hands,’ and he stretched them. ‘Close your mouth,’ and he closed it. ‘Shut your eyes,’ and he shut them.”

And then he was gone. In what the Talmud describes as a "*Death Kiss*," G-d gently and lovingly called home the soul of that very special man. The man of peace who lived his life in pursuit of peace returned to his Creator in peace.

Moses and Aaron had different jobs. Necessarily, Moses, as the King and "Chief Justice of the Supreme Court," had to maintain a more distant and aloof position. On many occasions, he reprimanded individuals as well as groups in order to steer them from sin.

Aaron had a different technique in dissuading sinners. He would greet every person, saint and sinner alike, with a friendly greeting. Then the sinner would ask himself, "How can I continue to sin, when a righteous man like Aaron is so kind to me? He thinks I'm righteous too. How can I let him down?"

Maskil LeDavid (a commentary on Rashi; it is quoted in Artscroll Rashi on Deuteronomy, 34:8) points out that people in conflict received different resolutions depending upon whom they consulted. If they went to Aaron the peacemaker, he would attempt to work out a peaceful compromise that made everyone happy. On the other hand, Moses, the judge, would examine the dispute based upon the merits of the case and render a decision as to who was right and who was wrong. As a result, it was more likely that the disputing parties left Aaron in peace than if they had consulted Moses.

Therefore, the mourning for Aaron was more widespread than for Moses.

Whose approach was better? Who was a better advocate of proper behavior? If the answer were to be determined purely by a popularity contest, Aaron would appear to be the winner.

However, it seems that G-d viewed it differently. Moses' life ended with the same peaceful "*Death Kiss*" that his brother Aaron received. We find many references to Moses and Aaron being considered as equals in their importance in G-d's eyes.

Moses and Aaron played different roles in the leadership of Israel. One was more "peaceful"; one was more "tough." Different situations require different methodologies.

The Torah tells us to "*Honor your father and your mother*, (Exodus, 20:12), while it tells us, "*Revere one's mother and father*." (Leviticus, 19:3) The order of who comes first is reversed. Human nature is such that one tends to honor one's mother more because she is USUALLY the softer and kinder of the two parents. Therefore, the Torah emphasizes honoring one's FATHER, making sure he doesn't take a second row seat behind the mother. Conversely, when it comes to reverence, human nature would put the father ahead. Therefore the Torah emphasizes the MOTHER, assuring that she is not a "second-class citizen."

Every person has strengths that make him special. When G-d created the world, He created the human race starting with one man and one woman. We all descend from that original couple. The animals, on the other hand, began with lots of lions and tigers and bears. The Talmud tells us that the reason we started off with one couple is so that every person can say, "the world was created for me."

There is only one of me, and there is only one of you. I'm not more important than you, and you are not more important than me. We each have contributions that we can and must make. It behooves us to see and appreciate the greatness of every single human being – and recognizing our own potential is a good place to start.

Have a great Shabbos

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