



Likkutei Sichos

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Deflecting the Spotlight

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1.

MOURNING FOR MOSHE

After the deaths of Moshe and Aharon, the Jewish people wept. But each time, they expressed their grief differently: Regarding Aharon's passing, the verse says,¹ "The **entire house** of Israel wept." Regarding Moshe's passing, the verse says,² "The **sons** of Israel wept..." To clarify this difference, two explanations are given:³

- a) After Aharon died,⁴ "*everyone* wept {not just the men} out of respect and reverence for **Moshe** who was crying (for Aharon)."⁵ In contrast, after Moshe died, "there was no one {else alive} of Moshe's stature who wept for Moshe. Thus, *only the men* wept."⁶
- b) After Moshe died,⁷ only the men wept. However, because Aharon "*pursued peace and made peace* between a man and his fellow and between a woman and her husband, it says, 'the entire house of Israel {wept}' — men and women."⁸

The first explanation emphasizes the unique stature of Moshe — {for Moshe,} "the **sons** of Israel wept" (only the men), and not "the entire house of Israel," as was the case for Aharon, because there was no one of Moshe's stature to inspire "the entire house of Israel" to weep.

The second explanation, however, emphasizes the opposite: This very same observation (that "**the sons** of Israel wept for Moshe" — the men and not the women) underscores that Moshe's virtue of promoting peace was not as perfect as Aharon's.

¹ *Bamidbar* 20:29.

² *Devarim* 34:8.

³ See *Avos DeRabbi Nassan*, ch. 12, sec. 4.

⁴ The second opinion in *Avos DeRabbi Nassan*, loc. cit.; *Ibn Ezra*; *Paneach Raza*; and *Chizkuni* and *Or HaChaim* on *Devarim* 34:8.

⁵ Wording of *Paneach Raza*.

⁶ Cited in *Paneach Raza*.

⁷ *Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer*, ch. 17; *Kallah Rabbasi*, ch. 3; *Tanchuma* (Buber ed.), addenda to "Chukas," sec. 2; Rashi on *Devarim* 34:8.

⁸ Rashi on *Devarim* 34:8; Rashi gives a similar explanation on *Bamidbar* 20:29.

This raises a question: When mentioning Moshe's passing, it is apropos for Scripture to speak of his **exemplary qualities**. We see this in these very verses {that chronicle Moshe's passing}:⁹ "And Moshe... his eye had not dimmed.... No other prophet arose (like Moshe).... As manifested by all the signs and wonders... and all the strong hand...." So why is it appropriate here to point out that Moshe **did not** excel in promoting peace to the same degree as Aharon?

2.

RASHI'S WORDING

This conundrum becomes even more complicated when we note the word order in Rashi's explanation:

Rashi says:

The sons of Israel – the men. But in Aharon's case, since he would pursue peace and restore peace between a man and his fellow and between a woman and her husband, it says, "the entire house of Israel {wept}" – men and women.

Seemingly, if Rashi's only objective is to address why it says, "The entire house of Israel" regarding Aharon, whereas regarding Moshe, it says, "The sons of Israel," Rashi should have **begun** with this idea: "(*The sons of Israel* – the men.) And regarding Aharon, it says 'the entire house of Israel' – men and women" (and only afterward, Rashi should have stated the reason:) "since he would pursue peace...."

By beginning with the idea of Aharon pursuing peace – and moreover describing this at length (particularly since Rashi already said this **earlier**¹⁰ concerning Aharon's passing) – Rashi intimates that his intention is (not only to explain his reason and what compelled him to explain that, "the **sons** of Israel wept" [in our verse] means, "the men," but also) to highlight Aharon's virtue in comparison with Moshe (regarding pursuing peace).

⁹ *Devarim* 34:7; 34:10 ff.

¹⁰ *Bamidbar* 20:29, with some changes in wording.

It is astonishing that in our *parshah*, which discusses the passing of **Moshe**, the Torah should emphasize — and at length — a **shortcoming** in **Moshe's** virtue (relative to Aharon's).

And we cannot answer that — on the contrary — because of the superiority and loftiness of Moshe Rabbeinu's stature, the Torah needs to clarify that concerning **this** matter (*ahavas Yisrael*¹¹ and promoting peace), we must not be content to emulate Moshe's conduct. Instead, we must learn from and emulate Aharon's conduct. However, the difficulty with this answer is that it would seem that **this** is not the place to address this point.

From the above, it is understood that when learning about Moshe's passing, it is relevant to recognize the difference between Moshe and Aharon, including Aharon's virtue when compared with Moshe's.

For this reason, the verse **here** stresses, “the **sons** of Israel wept for Moshe,” and Rashi clarifies (discloses) that by using this wording, the intent is to emphasize Aharon's virtue (relative to Moshe's). Aharon would “pursue peace and restore peace between a man and his fellow and between a woman and her husband.”

3.

THE UNIQUENESS OF THE “TRUSTED SHEPHERD”

We will understand {the succinct answer given at the end of Section 2} by prefacing with the reason we find no teachings of our Sages regarding Moshe's practice in restoring peace between a man and his fellow and between a woman and her husband, as we do for Aharon:

Obviously, the scarcity of teachings is not due to a shortcoming in Moshe's *ahavas Yisroel*, G-d forbid. On the contrary, “Moshe Rabbeinu was a lover of the Jewish people.”¹² He was the trusted shepherd of each and every Jew and provided for all their needs:

¹¹ {The mitzvah to love a fellow Jew.}

¹² *Menachos* 65a

He provided for their spiritual needs by (personally) studying Torah with “the entire nation”¹³ — not only the Torah’s **laws** (which the Jewish people are obligated to know, to know “the deeds that they should do”¹⁴ and those “that may not be done,”)¹⁵ but the Torah dialectic as well, which was “given only to Moshe and his descendants,” yet “Moshe was **generous** with the Torah and gave it to the Jewish people.”¹⁶

Moshe also provided for the Jewish people’s material needs, beginning with the manna, which was given in his merit, and subsequently, also their (other) needs. Initially, these other needs were provided in the merit of Aharon and Miriam. However, when Aharon and Miriam passed away and the well and the Clouds of Glory departed, both the well and the Clouds of Glory returned in Moshe’s merit.¹⁷

Rather, the straightforward explanation {as to why we find a scarcity of teachings regarding Moshe restoring peace} is that Moshe’s purpose and mission demanded a sort of *ahavas Yisroel* (and promotion of peace) different from that of Aharon.

4.

ABSOLUTE TRUTH

The explanation: Regarding the manner in which Aharon brought peace, our Sages teach¹⁸ that to make peace between a man and his fellow, etc., Aharon “deviated” from the truth, something which is, of course, permissible (and desirable) according to the Torah. As our Sages taught,¹⁹ “It is permitted to deviate {from the truth} to bring peace.” [As discussed elsewhere²⁰ concerning

¹³ *Eruvin* 54a; Rashi, end of *Ki Sisa*.

¹⁴ {*Shemos* 18:20.}

¹⁵ {*Vayikra* 4:13, et passim.}

¹⁶ *Nedarim* 38a.

¹⁷ *Taanis* 9a.

¹⁸ *Avos DeRabbi Nassan*, ch. 12, sec. 3; *Kallah Rabbasi*, ch. 3; *Derech Eretz Zuta*, “*Perek HaShalom*”; see also *Maamarei Admor HaZaken HaKetzarim*, p. 414.

¹⁹ *Yevamos* 65b.

²⁰ *Sichos* of 20 Av and *parshas Eikev*, 5741.

the Sages' carefully chosen wording — “It is permitted...to **deviate**” — implies merely “changing” {the truth}, but not, G-d forbid, lying outright (the opposite of the Torah of Truth).]

However, since **truth**²¹ was Moshe's distinctive **attribute**, this impeded Moshe from fostering peace **this** way.

Although the concept that “it is permitted... to deviate {from the truth} to bring peace” is, as mentioned, a directive of Torah — the Torah of **truth** — nevertheless, this conduct involves “concealing” the truth. Therefore, it was not befitting for someone {namely, Moshe} whose role and unique attribute (and level) was truth. For Aharon, such conduct was possible since he exemplified the attribute of peace.²²

When Moshe studied Torah with the Jewish people, he taught them all the Torah values as well, including the directive that “it is permitted... to deviate {from the truth} to bring peace.” However, regarding his own practice, aligned with **his** stature and (consequently) his mission in this world, such conduct {even merely veering from the truth,} was impossible.

Perhaps we can add even more: It was impossible {for Moshe} to lower himself to the level of those who were in such a lowly state that the **only** tactic available to make peace between them was to **depart** from the **truth**.

5.

CHANCE TO REFLECT

Since both modes of conduct are in accordance with the Torah, it is clear that each has an advantage:

The advantage of Moshe's conduct is that it entails no deviation from the attribute of truth. Conversely, there is an advantage in Aharon's conduct in that

²¹ *Shemos Rabbah*, sec. 5, par. 10; see also *Sanhedrin* 111a; et al.

²² *Shemos Rabbah*, sec. 5, par. 10; et al.

specifically, through such conduct, a person can reach those who are the “lowest” (those for whom we must “deviate”).

On this basis, we can understand why we emphasize Aharon’s virtue specifically when discussing Moshe’s passing:

During Moshe’s lifetime, when he was occupied with accomplishing **his** mission in this world, he was preoccupied with his mode of *avodah*. And his mission in the world was to “do” **everything** according to the attribute of **truth**.

However, when the time came that “Moshe ascended... to Mount Nevo”²³ — he had already completed his mission in the world and was ready to ascend On High — it was time for him to appreciate Aharon’s virtue, which brings peace to **every** Jew.

This is **similar** to the explanation of the famous remark that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai made just prior to his passing:²⁴ “I do not know on which (path) they are leading me.”²⁵ The question is well known: How could Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, one of the greatest *Tannaim*,²⁶ have been uncertain whether he was going to *Gan Eden* or to *Gehinnom*?! After all, the Sages are effusive in several places²⁷ regarding Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai’s greatness, and he was undoubtedly extremely careful to “turn from evil and do good.”²⁸

The following explanation has been given:²⁹ Although he was certain that in terms of his revealed abilities, his *avodah*³⁰ was perfect, he was, nevertheless, unsure whether he had accomplished what he had to in terms of the **essence** of his soul (which is beyond revelation).

²³ *Devarim* 34:1.

²⁴ *Berachos* 28b.

²⁵ {Meaning, he was unsure whether, after his passing, he would be found deserving of *Gan Eden* — paradise; or *Gehinnom* — purgatory.}

²⁶ {*Tanna* is the title given to Sages of the Mishnaic Era.}

²⁷ See examples: *Sukkah* 28a; *Rosh Hashanah* 31b; *Sifri*, end of “*Berachah*.”

²⁸ {*Tehillim* 37:27.}

²⁹ *Likkutei Torah*, “*Vayikra*,” addenda, 50d.

³⁰ {Divine service.}

But the question remains: If Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai was unsure about the status of the essence of his soul — whether it was in a state of holiness or, G-d forbid, the opposite — why did this only pain him just prior to his passing? Why not earlier, throughout his entire life?

One of the explanations:³¹

Throughout his life, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai was entirely occupied and invested in his mission in this world — studying Torah on his own and with others, etc. He had no time to pause and think about his spiritual “level” and his status as it pertained to the essence of his soul.

Specifically, before his passing, when he was about to **complete** his mission in this world, he could think about the state of the essence of his soul.

The same applies here {regarding Moshe}: Specifically, before his passing, when Moshe had already completed his mission in this world, it was time for him to ponder the distinctions between his *avodah* and Aharon’s *avodah*. At that time, he came to fully appreciate Aharon’s superior virtue.

Accordingly, it is also written this way in “The **Torah** of Moshe”: The excellence of Aharon’s *avodah* compared with that of Moshe’s is explicitly emphasized in the verses that discuss Moshe’s passing.

³¹ See *Kitzurim VeHe’aros LeTanya*. pp. 46-47 for an explanation along these lines; see a lengthy explanation in *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 16, p. 272.

6.

THE FIFTIETH GATE

However, this answer is not entirely sufficient:

Moshe's attribute is the attribute of truth that, seemingly, never changes, regardless of whether Moshe is below (occupied with his mission in this world) or when his soul is about to ascend On High — wherever he is, Moshe's primary attribute is **truth**. Why, then, do we say that he felt the truth of the virtue of Aharon's *avodah* at the time of his passing?

The explanation (according to Chassidus):

Moshe's departure was not (only) physical — his soul departing his body. Instead, it was (also and mainly) a **spiritual** departure and ascent; his soul ascended to a much³² higher level than the levels he attained during his life in this world.³³

This corresponds to the well-known interpretation (explanation)³⁴ of the verse, “*Moshe ascended... to הַר נֵבֹוּ, Mount Nevo — נוֹן בוּ, there are fifty³⁵ in him*”: During his lifetime, Moshe attained the forty-nine Gates of Understanding; on the day of his passing, he merited to ascend to the fiftieth Gate. (“There are fifty in him.”)

This is also the deeper meaning of the phrase, “Moshe **ascended...**”: Moshe's function is **drawing** down (*shushvina d'Malka*),³⁶ which is why he

³² Even though all his days were lived in a manner consistent with the command to **ascend** in matter of holiness {*Yoma* 12b, et passim}.

³³ See *Schach Al HaTorah, Devarim* 34:1; see also *Or HaTorah, “Vaeschanan,”* p. 78.

³⁴ Arizal's *Sefer HaLikkutim, “Vaeschanan”* (3:26), cited in *Shelah, “Torah Shebichsav, ‘Vaeschanan’*” (369a) quoting Rav Chaim Vital; *Shach al HaTorah on Devarim* 34:1 (his source: “I found it written...”); see at length *Likkutei Torah, “Bamidbar”* 12a ff. (quoting the Mezritcher Maggid); et al.

³⁵ {The numerical equivalent of the Hebrew letter *nun*.}

³⁶ {Lit., “the attendant of the King” — of Hashem;} see *Sefer HaArachin Chabad, vol. 2, “Aharon,”* par. 4, **and the sources cited there.**

brought the Torah down into the world. “Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and passed it on....”³⁷

Aharon, however, is “*shushvina d’Matrunisa*”³⁸ — he ignites (and **raises**) the lights of the menorah — “when you **raise** the lamps”³⁹ — “until the flame rises by itself.”⁴⁰ Spiritually, this intimates⁴¹ that he uplifts the souls of the Jewish people (“A man’s soul is the lamp of Hashem”),⁴² causing them to ascend to their root and source.

On the day of his passing, Moshe was elevated higher than his own {innate} level by obtaining Aharon’s virtue of ascension — he “**ascended...**” — an ascent from below to Above.⁴³

[This is also correlated to why, at that time, he merited to attain the fiftieth Gate:

During his lifetime, when Moshe’s service was restricted by his attribute {of truth} and his level, all forty-nine Gates of Understanding were luminescent for him — but only these forty-nine Gates, as the number forty-nine represents the limits of the world (seven times seven — the seven days of Creation).⁴⁴

When, however, Moshe experienced his “ascent,” rising above and transcending his limits, to the point that his *avodah* was not confined— not even by his own holy nature (the attribute of truth) — only to the channel of “drawing from Above to below,” but also included the elevation from below to Above,⁴⁵ Moshe’s ascent was connected with him being given the fiftieth Gate, which is beyond limitation.]

³⁷ Beg. of *Avos*.

³⁸ {Lit., “the attendant of the Queen” — the Jewish people.}

³⁹ {*Bamidbar* 8:2.}

⁴⁰ Rashi, beg. of *parshas Behaaloscha*.

⁴¹ *Likkutei Torah*, beg. of “*Behaaloscha*.”

⁴² {*Mishlei* 20:27.}

⁴³ in contrast to Moshe’s ascent at Mt. Sinai. It was not an “elevation,” per se, but the opposite. It was (for the sake of) bringing the Torah down **below**.

⁴⁴ {Lit., “the seven days of building” (the world).} See *Likkutei Torah*, “*Bamidbar*,” 12a ff.

⁴⁵ This is in addition to the drawing down from Above to below that continues also after his passing, for “here, as well, he is standing and serving” On High — *Sotah* 13b.

In this context, we can also deduce what happened in terms of Moshe's *avahas Yisrael*⁴⁶ and promotion of peace {among people}:

Since on the day of his passing Moshe's *avodah* “**ascended...**” — the level {and main *avodah*} of Aharon — it was then that Moshe fully appreciated the virtue of Aharon's peace-making (which, as discussed above, extended to all Jews).

7.

MOSHE'S ULTIMATE *AHAVAS YISRAEL*

In light of the whole discussion above, we can posit another aspect of Moshe's great *avahas Yisrael*:

In the verses discussing Moshe's passing, Moshe himself points out and declares (with *ruach hakodesh*)⁴⁷ the superior virtue of Aharon. Moshe does so to teach the Jewish people how broad and deep *avahas Yisrael* must extend.

True, Moshe exhibited his own great virtue of *avahas Yisrael*, which indeed advanced continuously throughout his lifetime (“we ascend in matters of holiness”).⁴⁸ He surely ascended from one level to the next in his *avahas Yisrael* (just as he progressed in all sacred matters).

Nevertheless, such conduct still falls short. A person must strive to emulate the conduct of **Aharon** — “Pursue peace and make peace between a man and his fellow, and between a woman and her husband.”

— From talks delivered on Shabbos night, Chol Hamoed Sukkos and Simchas Torah day, 5742 (1981)

⁴⁶ {The mitzvah to love a fellow Jew.}

⁴⁷ {Lit., “the holy spirit,” this term connotes Divine inspiration;} *Tosafos* on *Megillah* 31b, s.v., “*Moshe Meatzmo*.”

⁴⁸ {*Yoma* 12b, et passim.}