

International Rabbinic Fellowship

Weekly Dvar Torah

Parshat Chukat 2

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This week's Dvar Torah is provided by Rabbi Gavriel Goldfeder, Aish Kodesh, Boulder, CO

Miriam and Aharon dying in one parsha was a severe blow to Moshe and to the Jewish people. While we know nothing of the mourning process for Miriam, the Torah does tell us how the people reacted to Aharon's death.:

וַיֵּרְאוּ כָּל הָעֵדָה כִּי גָעַ אַהֲרֹן וַיִּכְפוּ אֶת אָהֲרֹן שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם כָּל
בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל:

When the entire community saw that Aharon had died, the entire house of Israel cried for Aharon for thirty days.

In contrast, when Moshe died, the Torah says,

וַיִּכְפוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת מֹשֶׁה בְּעֶרְבַת מוֹאָב שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם

And the children of Israel cried for Moshe in Arvat Moav for thirty days.

Rashi on our parsha explains the difference.

כל בית ישראל - האנשים והנשים לפי שהיה אהרן רודף
מריבה ובין איש לאשתו: שלום ומטיל אהבה בין בעלי

The whole house of Israel – men and women, because Aharon pursued peace and cultivated peace

between people who were fighting, and between man and wife.

Peace is held universally as an ideal, but capable peace-makers are few and far between. Yet we remind ourselves daily to aspire to be peace-makers. Upon reciting birchot hatorah in the morning, we recite the first Mishnah of Peah: "These are things that a person benefits from the 'fruits' in this world, while the principal remains in place for the world to come.... bringing peace between friends." While this can be understood on many levels, it is best not to forget the simplest one. I was taken aback by a story of Rabbi Aryeh Levine z"l who noticed a certain couple within his community who were fighting. He spent a great deal of time with them, helping them work through their issues. When he had succeeded in helping them reconcile, the husband insisted that the Rabbi take a gift of 50 pounds. The husband insisted and finally the Rabbi agreed to take it, whereupon he went out and bought the wife an expensive gift – and said it was from the husband!

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Let's look at the fact that Aharon was mourned by the women, but Moshe was not. Wasn't Moshe

involved in shalom bayit? It doesn't seem so. Moshe is on the mountain or in the tent, receiving and transmitting the vision; and Aharon is in the trenches, dealing with Shalom Bayit, with tzara'at, with sins and sin offerings, with confessions and blood and guts.

Rather than making this critique of Moshe, we should consider the possibility that there are two kinds of rabbis. Some are great at law – they love learning, teaching, writing, thinking, answering—that's Moshe. And others have no patience for the Beit Midrash, but are at ease with a shiva call, a visit to the hospital, a long walk with a troubled congregant.

Some, thank G-d, are good at both. These remarkable people touch our lives in so many ways, and it is a wonder how they have time to do it all. But I do not. I prefer thinking, books, ideas, mountains (hello Boulder!). I do not accept this as *fait accompli*, I know that, as a Jew, as a human, I am obligated to do Aharon-work as well, and I make myself do it despite my internal resistance.

But I wonder about the possibility of pairing up rabbis/leaders for communities: one is primarily teaching Torah, answering questions, and the like, and the other is more involved in life cycles.

The Reform synagogue in my town has that split, and it works famously for both of them, though obviously the lines are not so rigid.

Rabbis need to figure out what they are best at, and communities need to figure out how individual rabbis can best serve. I'll never forget R' Dr. Avraham Twersky telling me directly, and I think these were his exact words, about why he decided to not be a pulpit rabbi: "I realized if I had to listen to another haftarah I would jump off a bridge."

Do we have the luxury of a dichotomy between scholars, life-cycle-ists, speakers, and CEOs among the rabbinate? Do we make it clear in our *yeshivas* that chaplaincy, Hillel and the pulpit are not the only options?

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There are two calls to action here. For those of us who are capable of being peace-makers, ordained or not, the world needs us urgently, and we should leave our desks and get to it – marriages, friends, board, shuls, wider communities. The world sorely needs peace makers.

And I call for another consideration – what about reclaiming the Moshes of the world, the people who can help bring the Torah of Now into the world, who can help us understand how to move forward, without making them also listen to Johnny's haftarah for the 11th time?

Shabbat Shalom!

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