

AHARON & PEACE / SICHON & CHESHBON HANEFESH

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #994 – Bilam and his Donkey: A Problem With Tzar Ba'alei Chaim? Good Shabbos!

Aharon Kohen Gadol: Lover of Peace and Pursuer of Peace

Parshas Chukas contains the narratives of the death of both Aharon the Kohen Gadol [High Priest] and Miriam HaNevia [the prophetess]. The pasuk states that when Aharon died he was mourned by the entire House of Israel (*kol Beis Yisrael*) for thirty days [Bamidbar 20:29]. If we look ahead to Parshas Zos HaBracha where Moshe Rabbeinu dies [Devorim 34:8], the Torah also says that the Jewish people mourned for thirty days, but the expression "kol Beis Yisrael" [the entire House of Israel] is not used there. By Moshe the *pasuk* merely says "*Bnei Yisrael*" [the Children of Israel] mourned for him.

Rashi takes note of this in our parsha: The expression "*kol Beis Yisrael*" includes both the men and the women. The universal mourning for Aharon was because he was a peacemaker. He went out of his way to make peace between fighting husbands and wives and other friends who had experienced partings of the way. Aharon had a reputation for being a lover of peace and a pursuer of peace (*ohev shalom, v'rodef shalom*). Therefore, the women also felt a tremendous closeness to him and they participated equally with the men in mourning his death, which was not necessarily the case with Moshe, whose primary interaction with the nation was teaching the men Torah.

This troubles the Maharal in the Gur Aryeh. The Maharal argues that it is inconceivable that the entire House of Israel did not feel closeness to Moshe Rabbeinu. He was their leader for the last 40 years. He took them out of Egypt and he took care of all their needs in the Wilderness. He pleaded on their behalf before the Almighty. He taught them Torah. He provided for the needs of men, women, and children -- the entire Nation of Israel! The Maharal is unwilling to accept the idea that the women did not cry by the death of the leader of the nation.

Therefore, The Maharal concludes that certainly the women cried by Moshe's death as well. However, it was still a different level of crying than what took place when Aharon died. This is

because while true that what Moshe provided to *Klal Yisrael* was of value to both men and women, there was not a difference between how he dealt with the men and how he dealt with the women. He was the leader. He made sure that everyone was safe, everyone was fed, everyone was taken care of, and everyone knew the Torah. Moshe Rabbeinu provided this uniform service to men and women equally.

The crying, therefore, that took place upon Moshe's death was indistinguishable -- there was no difference between the men's crying and the women's crying. However, the Maharal writes, by Aharon, when he saw a dispute brewing between husband and wife he treated them differently. When trying to make peace between two people who are angry at one another it is important to address each of them according to their own psychological makeup. When husbands and wives are unfortunately at each other's throats, it is necessary to talk to the men in one way and to the women in another way.

Aharon's interaction with the members of the Jewish nation, unlike his brother's, was not uniform. He accepted as his mission to be a peacemaker in Klal Yisrael. In order to accomplish this mission, it was necessary to have two ways of addressing the litigants. When a husband complains about his wife that she does not do this and does not do that, you need to tell the husband "but listen, she bore your children, she takes care of your children, look at her other good traits, etc." When a woman complains about her husband, "he is a slob, he never cleans up after himself, he always leaves his socks on the floor of the tent, etc." Aharon responded differently. He tells her, "but listen, he is a good provider, he is a Talmid Chochom, etc."

The language and the approach was distinct, tailoring his message to each party depending on what was appropriate for them to hear and what would be effective in reestablishing marital harmony.

This is what Rashi means. There was a different type of crying at the funeral of the two brothers. In Aharon's case, he meant one thing to the women and he meant another thing to the men. The *Aveilus* [mourning] was not identical throughout the nation, but rather personalized to the different components thereof -- men remembered him one way and women remembered him another way. In the case of Moshe Rabbeinu, his service to the nation was uniform and the *Aveilus* the people experienced when he passed on was also uniform.

With the above insight, we can perhaps appreciate another observation from the beginning of the parsha. Towards the beginning of the parsha, Miriam dies. Immediately following her death, the Torah says, "There was no water for the assembly and they gathered together against Moshe and against Aharon. The people quarreled with Moshe and spoke up saying, 'If only we had perished by the demise of our brothers before Hashem!'" [Bamidbar 20:2-3] Our Rabbis tell us that Hashem provided the miraculous well that accompanied the Jews throughout their sojourn in the Wilderness in the merit of Miriam. Consequently, when she died, the well stopped providing water.

However, if we read these *pesukim* carefully, we can observe something very interesting. The

people "gathered" against both Moshe and Aharon, however when they "quarreled" they directed their complaints only against Moshe! What happened to Aharon? Why were they only complaining to Moshe, once they had gathered against both brothers?

I saw this question brought down in a sefer called Baalei Bris Avrohom. He answers that when the people "gathered" against both Moshe and Aharon they came for *nichum aveilim* [to comfort mourners] because Moshe and Aharon had just lost their sister. Fine. They all recited, "Hamakom Yenachem Eschem etc - May the Almighty comfort you in the midst of the other mourners for Zion and Jerusalem." However, there is no water. So they direct their complaints to Moshe only. Why only to Moshe? The sefer Baalei Bris Avrohom responds that their original intent was to complain to both Moshe and Aharon, but once they found themselves in Aharon's presence, they were too embarrassed to complain to him because he was always one who loved peace and ran after peace. They just could not quarrel with him because he was such a lover of peace and such a beloved figure in the nation.

Come To Cheshbon...

Towards the end of Parshas Chukas Sichon king of Emori did not permit *Klal Yisrael* passage through his territory. He led his people in war against the Jews and was defeated in a battle in which Israel conquered all his cities including Sichon's capital -- Cheshbon. The Torah says that Sichon had earlier conquered this very same land from the king of Moav. In short, Sichon captured the land from Moav and *Klal Yisrael* captured it from him.

There is an irony here. The Torah says that *Klal Yisrael* was not allowed to do battle with Moav "...for I will not give you from their land an inheritance, for to the children of Lot I have given Ar as an inheritance." [Devorim 2:9]. Had this territory remained the property of Moav, *Klal Yisrael* would have had to leave it alone, because Hashem forbade them to make war with Moav. What happened? Sichon made war with Moav, he captured their territory, and it became his. Once it became Sichon's all restrictions were off. This is what the Talmud means by saying, "Ammon and Moav became 'purified' through Sichon." [Gittin 38a].

Following this victory, the Torah says "About this the poets (*moshlim*) would say: 'Come to Cheshbon; let it be built and established -- the town of Sichon.'" The Talmud in Bava Basra [78b] interprets this enigmatic verse allegorically.

"About this the *moshlim* would say" -- this refers to those who rule over their evil inclination (interpreting the word *moshlim* to be from the word *moshel* -- to rule -- rather than *mashal* -- parable -- which would be the "simple" interpretation of the expression *moshlim* -- those who say parables).

"...come to Cheshbon" -- this refers to a world class reckoning of the soul (interpreting the word

Cheshbon as a verb from the expression *cheshbon hanefesh* -- a moral reckoning, rather than a proper noun referring to Sichon's capital city). The lesson is to evaluate the tradeoff between the expense of a mitzvah and its tremendous reward, the "profit" to be had from doing a sin and the ultimate loss (to your soul) that it will cause.

This is what the *pasuk* is saying. It is not referring to poets offering parables and it is not referring to the City of Cheshbon. The *pasuk* is telling us to make calculations and to evaluate the priorities in our life.

It seems that the Talmud is using the hermeneutic principle of "*Gezerah Shavah*" [comparison of common scriptural words in two places to learn out meanings and nuance from one context to another]. However, how does the Gemara fit this into the context of the *pasuk*? What does this have to do with Sichon, king of Emori? What does this have to do with the just completed battle?

It can be argued that it has nothing to do with Sichon and with the war -- it is just a Rabbinic homily to teach a moral lesson. However, it would seem so arbitrary and out of place if there is not also a relationship to the *pasuk's* context.

I saw in a sefer that this homiletic lesson is related to the context of the *pasuk*: Imagine now how Sichon felt after the war with Israel. When he conquered Moav, it cost him men, material, and treasure. However, he thought that -- at least I now have all this new territory! What happened? Precisely because of his conquest, despite all that he put into it, this is what enabled *Klal Yisrael* to gain control of this otherwise "untouchable" territory. The last thing in the world Sichon would have wanted in doing battle with Moav is to make it possible for the Jews to gain this territory. Had he made a "*cheshbon*" of what might happen, he would have certainly concluded, "I do not want to do the dirty work of Israel for them!" However, he was a victim of the old Yiddish maxim -- *a mentsch tracht un G-t lacht* ["A man plans and G-d laughs."] This is exactly what happened to Sichon. Sichon had his "*cheshbon*", but the Almighty had His own "*cheshbon*" -- which is the only "*cheshbon*" that ever counts in the world -- the "*Cheshbono shel Olam*."

This is how Chazal made the homiletic lesson fit into this *pasuk* of "Come to Cheshbon..." Make a "*Cheshbono shel Olam*" -- a calculation in line with the Will of the Creator of the world: "weighing the expense of a mitzvah against its reward and the gain of a sin against its cost to the soul."

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Chukas is provided below:

- #018 - Rending Garments on Seeing Yerushalayim
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- #1255 - I keep 72 Minutes, You Keep 45 -- Can I Drive Home With You After 45 Minutes?
- #1256 - The Last Day of Sheva Brachos Starting Before Sh'kia, Bentching After Tzais -- Are There Sheva Brachos? And other such Shailos.

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