



AHARON

Pursuing Peace

Rabbi Shmuel Kagan

One of my most cherished acts as a Jew is standing by the Aron HaKodesh in front of the Torah scrolls, with my tallit draped over half my body, repeating the ancient bracha of the Kohanim. With my eyes closed, hands outstretched, and my mind focused on the congregation standing in front of me, I consider their needs and how Hashem has endowed my tribe with the great privilege of channeling His blessings. What makes us Kohanim special is not what we, personally, have accomplished, but rather the extraordinary character and deeds of our ancestor Aharon, one of the seven Ushpizin with whom we share our sukkah.

Aharon was kadosh (holy), separated from the rest of the Jewish people because of his designation as a priest. There is a mitzvah to honor Kohanim (Vayikra 21:8), and Kohanim are subject to greater restrictions than the rest of the Jewish people, including restrictions on whom they can marry and what they can touch. Despite these regulations on their conduct, the unique status of the Kohanim can lead to jealousy, the most notable case being that of Korach, who rebelled against Aharon's elevated position (Bamidbar 16). Nevertheless, the Torah tells us that all of Am Yisrael mourned for Aharon (Bamidbar 20:29). While many followers naturally resent those who lead them, the people of Israel deeply loved and honored Aharon. What made Aharon so special?

Rashi explains that all of Israel mourned for Aharon because he would make peace between husband and wife and bring Jews closer to Torah

out of sincere love for and devotion to the people. The Rabbis are deeply moved by Aharon's love for Am Yisrael, and encourage the entire nation to learn from his example, to not only love peace but to pursue it as well (Pirkei Avot 1:12). Kohanim, in particular, must follow Aharon's example; the bracha recited by Kohanim before they duchen adjures them to bless the people "with love."

Aharon was promoted to a position of authority, but he used that position to serve the people. His descendants step up to the platform not to raise themselves in haughtiness but to become conduits of Heavenly blessing from on high. And so Am Yisrael was grateful, not jealous, of Aharon because they knew he was using his power for their benefit.

The Gemara tells us in numerous places that Torah scholars are called "builders" because they bring peace to the world. Superficially, this seems like a misplaced compliment; every page of the Talmud is filled with arguments among Torah scholars! All Batei Midrash are full of Torah students arguing and shouting at each other! Is it really possible to say that Torah scholars bring peace to the world?

In truth, real peace, real shalom, is not accomplished when everyone agrees with each other. Real shalom requires shleimut, completeness; it is the harmony achieved when each person or creation fulfills its unique role. When Torah scholars argue in order to clarify G-d's will, their opposing opinions refine each other's understanding. A husband and wife can mend their relationship by highlighting their deep love for each other while recognizing

and embracing their differences. Aharon inspired peace by teaching Am Yisrael to respect and accept each others' differences, for it is our different strengths and abilities that enable the nation of Israel to be whole.

The Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 30:12) famously explains that each of the four species, the arba'a minim, represents a different type of Jew. On Sukkot, we bind them all together, reminding us of our shared identity despite our differences. The Talmud (Sukkah 27b) tells us that all of Israel should dwell in a single sukkah. Such a sukkah's size is beyond comprehension, but can you imagine such diverse people all feeling at home under one roof? I believe that this would be the sukkah of Aharon HaKohen's dreams. May we merit to sit there together with him!

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