

And they wept for Aharon thirty days, the entire Bais Yisrael. (20:29)

Rashi teaches that both the men and the women wept and grieved over the passing of Aharon *Hakohen*. This was because Aharon was the consummate *rodeif shalom*, pursuer of peace. He would instill peace and love between parties in a quarrel and between man and his wife. When Moshe *Rabbeinu* died, the Torah writes, “And *Bnei Yisrael* wept” (*Devarim* 34:8), implying that it was limited to the men. Are we to think that *Klal Yisrael’s* outpouring of grief over the loss of their quintessential *Rebbe* and leader was limited, because he was less of a “people person” than Aharon?

The *Imrei Emes* suggests that Moshe’s death was foreshadowed for some time prior to his actual passing. He had told them that his tenure on this earth was soon coming to a close, that he would not be accompanying the nation into the Holy Land. The people were able slowly to come to terms and accept the notion that the man who had taken them out of Egypt was not leading them into *Eretz Yisrael*. It was definitely a hard pill to swallow, but they had time to chew it through, to make it somewhat “palatable.”

Aharon, however, took leave of them suddenly. One day he was here, and the next day he was not. They saw Moshe, Aharon and Elazar leaving for the mountain, and on their return they only saw Moshe and Elazar. They knew. While death is an unfortunate, yet inevitable, part of life that touches everyone at one time or another, it is very difficult to come to terms with when it is sudden and unforeseeable. Psychologists write that when there is no time -- or opportunity -- to say goodbye, to have closure in some way, life is forever altered. Upon hearing the report of a sudden passing (especially if it comes under unusual and tragic circumstances), the person is confronted with an array of emotions from numbness and disbelief to incessant weeping. Many remain in denial, while others feel helpless and overwhelmed.

A secular psychologist distinguishes between sudden, unexpected death and anticipated death. In sudden death, we experience an added sense of regret and loneliness when we look at the empty chair and think of all the things we should have said -- and did not. While no one is ever prepared to say goodbye to a loved one, or to anyone close for that matter, the coping mechanism is more difficult when it is sudden. Suddenly the world that was theirs has changed: no more certainty; no more “to be expected” -- all has vanished.

Veritably, the idea of certainty in our life is an illusion of which we convince ourselves, so that we function with greater ease. A Jew should live by the alternative, to live in the present and to accept the Divine gift of life as a constantly renewed opportunity, which can cease at any moment.

In addressing the distinction between the expression of grief for Aharon and that for Moshe, the *Bais Yisrael* explains that Moshe’s power as *Klal Yisrael’s Rebbe* is to be found in every

generation. We certainly no longer have Moshe *Rabbeinu*, and we are very distant from the spiritual plane reached by the *Dor De'ah*, generation of knowledge. Understandably, with each ensuing generation, the people change, and its leadership changes commensurately. Yet, we have the *koach haTorah*, power generated by our Torah study, and our *rebbeim* all have a spark of leadership that comes with their ability to instruct Torah to each ensuing generation. Moshe is gone, but the power of Torah which he represents did not die. It remains with us in every situation, under every circumstance.

Unfortunately the *middos*, attributes that Aharon exemplified: his power to reach out to people and bring them close; his love of peace and ability to seek and pursue peace – were his alone. True, many people ascribe to his *middos* and devote themselves with great heart and effort to emulate his deeds – but there was only one Aharon *HaKohen*. For this loss, everyone wept.