

And you, bring near to yourself Aharon your brother. (28:1)

Chazal (Shemos Rabbah 37:2) teach that, when Moshe Rabbeinu descended the mountain and saw the shocking revelry surrounding the Golden Calf, he also saw Aharon HaKohen pounding on the molten image with a hammer. While, veritably, Aharon was doing all that he could to delay the worship until Moshe descended, the scenario in Moshe's first impression played itself out differently. Moshe thought (based upon his observation) that Aharon was collaborating with the people. It goes without saying that Moshe was troubled by what he saw. Thus, when Hashem instructed Moshe to "bring Aharon near," He was intimating to him, "Moshe, I know that Aharon had only good intentions with regard to the Golden Calf." In other words: "What you saw was not reality. Aharon may have been pounding on the image, but it was a delay tactic – not a subversive move."

What about, He'vei dan es kol ha'adam l'kaf z'chus; "Judge all men favorably"? Surely Aharon HaKohen warranted a favorable rendering of his actions. We are to presume that a righteous person does not suddenly change. If, until this point, he had always been meticulous in his observance of the law, why should we think otherwise? Just because he happens to be in a compromising situation, it does not mean that he compromised his beliefs. There must be a valid reason for what he is doing. Apparently, since Moshe did not know conclusively that Aharon was innocent of any vestige of guilt by association, an ever-so-slight whisper of doubt must have remained in his heart. He wondered: Were Aharon's actions truly l'shem Shomayim, for Heaven's sake?

If for some reason Moshe had a slight, almost undiscernible, suspicion that Aharon was a participant, it should have been short-lived. As soon as Aharon shed light on his behavior, it should have been sufficient validation. Why did Moshe harbor doubt in his mind – even if it was only subconscious? Why was it necessary for Hashem to clear Aharon's name? Horav A. Henoch Leibowitz, zl, explains that this incident demonstrates the decisive impact of a first impression. People judge automatically, and that first observation plays a pivotal role in their judgment call. Once a first impression is made, it is difficult to change (and with some people, under certain situations, it is virtually unchangeable). While a first impression is the worst means for judging people, it is inevitable. If a first impression is not a pleasant one, we will likely experience apprehension or fear upon encountering that person again. While, over time, impressions are due to change with a positive relationship, the original first impression still hangs in the background. In Moshe's case, his impression of Aharon's actions indicated a slight lack of absolute belief in his brother's innocence. Yet, a tinge of misgiving remained, in the most miniscule degree. This was a classic case of negative first impression which was based upon a faulty perception. When Aharon explained himself to Moshe, the intellectual doubt was resolved. The matter was laid to rest, but a vestige of that original impression left a negative feeling deep in Moshe's heart.

It is difficult to accept that Moshe Rabbeinu, our quintessential leader, would harbor such a subconscious feeling (ever) deep in his heart about his brother. Surely he knew better. Apparently, a dichotomy exists between the heart and the mind – the seat of emotion versus the intellect. While intellectually Moshe absolutely understood, without any tinge of doubt, that Aharon acted appropriately, defensively, on behalf of Klal Yisrael, he sought to spare the nation from falling into

the abyss of sin, Moshe's heart felt otherwise. Emotionally, he saw Aharon as a participant. This was his first perception – and it was not observed intellectually. Emotion almost always precedes intellect, thus allowing for a flawed first impression.

The Rosh Yeshivah warns us concerning passing judgment on people. If Moshe, whose love for his brother exceeded our realm of understanding, who loved him with all of his heart, fell prey to a negative first impression, despite an intellectual desire to read the situation differently, what should we say? It required Hashem's "interceding," confirming Aharon's innocence to sway Moshe from his earlier perception. Thus, we must be vigilant to remain open-minded and vigilant in our fair assessment of a given situation.

Furthermore, the Rosh Yeshivah derives a powerful lesson concerning the meaning of ahavas Yisrael, love for every Jew, and how far we must go to ensure the pristine nature of the love. Hashem made a special statement to Moshe, just to expunge any feeling of doubt in his mind concerning Aharon. Hashem felt it was important to assuage Moshe's concerns, so that the love that Moshe harbored for Aharon would not be impugned. Ahavas Yisrael must be total, absolute and without misgiving. Love – like truth – must be one hundred percent. Incomplete love is similar to incomplete truth: something which is ninety-nine percent true is one hundred percent false. Love must be unequivocal.