

And all the nation saw that Aharon was dead. (20:29)

When Miriam *Ha'Neviah* died, her loss to the nation became apparent, as the well (*B'eirah shel Miriam*) dried up. Likewise, when Aharon *HaKohen* died, his death was marked by an external manifestation; with the removal of the protective *Ananei HaKavod*, Pillars of Cloud, which traveled with them throughout their journeys. *Chazal* teach that there were three *parnasim*, providers, in whose merit *Klal Yisrael* benefited. Miriam, in whose merit they were sustained with water; Aharon, in whose merit the nation traveled without fear, as the clouds fended off any danger or obstacle; and Moshe *Rabbeinu*, in whose merit we were sustained by with Heavenly *manna* which descended daily.

Three leaders – three benefits which provided for their existence. The *Navi Michah* (6:4) underscores this when he says, “Did I (Hashem) not send before you a Moshe, an Aharon and a Miriam immediately when I liberated you from the house of slavery (Egypt)?” *Horav S. R. Hirsch*, *zl*, explains that Hashem was informing the nation that they should delve into the characters of these three leaders in order to discern what is their – the nation’s – task for the future. This task is described by the *Navi* (5:8), “What does Hashem ask of you? *Asos mishpat, v’ahavas chesed, v’hatznea leches im Elokecha*; Acting justly, loving, doing kindness and walking in quiet modesty with your G-d.” Indeed, when we think about it, explains *Rav Hirsch*, these three factors – which represent our moral mission in life – are just the qualities which respectively characterize our three leaders.

Mishpat, living one’s entire life justly in consonance with the strictures of *halachah*, Jewish law, was the mission and focus of Moshe *Rabbeinu*, whose life was devoted to teaching Hashem’s Torah to *Klal Yisrael*. *Chesed*, kindness, which means focusing one’s entire character on carrying out acts of lovingkindness, relinquishing one’s personal right to selflessly, joyfully acting as Aharon *HaKohen* lived: *Ohaiv shalom v’rodef shalom*, “loved peace and pursued peace.” He saw himself as a medium for promoting and maintaining good will. [It is important to stress that, when people are happy with themselves and with life, they act differently toward others. Most strife results when someone is troubled – economically, familial, socially, etc. When one is down, he often assuages his personal challenges by taking it out on others. Aharon helped to smooth out problems, and, by extension, the differences between people.]

Hatznei’ah leches, the unpretentious, morally pure, modest walking through life with Hashem is the most fundamental character of womanhood, for which Miriam is the archetype. Her influence provides the women (and the men) with a lesson and model for living as a Jew should live.

Tznius is represented by the quiet, hidden “well”, out of whose depth all holiness of life springs. *Chesed* is the giving, cooling and protecting “Cloud” which – joined together with the pure, clarity-providing rays of justice (*mishpat*) – will allow for the seeds of welfare and happiness to mature on the fields of mankind. *Mishpat* is the bread from Heaven, without which we are unable to live and endure as a healthy/moral nation. Thus, *Bnei Yisrael* had the *be’er*, well, through the merit

of Miriam, the cultivator of *Tznius*; the *Ananei HaKavod* through Aharon, who advanced the lessons and cause of *chesed*; and the *manna*, the bread of life, through the merit of Moshe, who nourished and promoted the *mishpat* teachings of Hashem. What appears on the surface to be material provisions – water, bread, protection from obstacles – are actually lessons on how to live – and, more importantly, lessons to guide us to realize that these benefits come with a price: adopting and living the lessons which they impart.