

Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon. (21:1)

The *Kohanim* represent our nation's spiritual elite. Their greatness is hereditary; thus, their responsibility to convey the compelling nature of their lineage and station in life to the next generation, is consequential. It is, therefore, noteworthy that they were excluded from the monarchy, as was the rest of the nation. On his deathbed, Yaakov *Avinu*, blessed each of his sons. He turned to Yehudah and said, *Lo yasur shevet miYehudah*, "The scepter shall not depart from Yehudah" (*Bereishis* 49:10). While this blessing did not take effect immediately, since Shaul *Hamelech*, our nation's first monarch, heralded from the tribe of Binyamin – every succeeding monarch, beginning with David *Hamelech*, descended from *shevet Yehudah*. *Ramban* posits that, exclusive of the fact that Yaakov bequeathed the monarchy to Yehudah, a special prohibition states that *Kohanim* may not reign. He claims that the *Chashmonaim*, who were righteous, G-d-fearing leaders, were severely punished and basically expunged from our nation because they had transgressed this interdiction. After the *Chanukah* miracle, they took the scepter of monarchy into their hands – and kept it in their domain.

Why are the *Kohanim* prohibited more so than any other *shevet* from ruling? It is not as if there is no precedent. *U'Malkitzedek, melech Shaleim... v'hu Kohen l'Keil Elyon*, "And Malkitzedek, king of Shaleim... he was a Priest of G-d, the Most High" (*Bereishis* 14:18). Furthermore, had Reuven not sinned, he would have received the honorarium of the crowns of both *Kehunah* and *Malchus*. Apparently, no friction exists between *Malchus* and *Kehunah*. On the contrary, it makes sense to suggest that one complements the other. Aharon *HaKohen* possessed the *Kesser Torah*, Crown of Torah, and the *Kesser Kehunah*. Why should he not also have enjoyed the *Kesser Malchus*?

Horav Aryeh Leib Heyman, zl, suggests that the cause for the exclusion of the *Kohanim* from monarchy originated when Aharon *HaKohen* did not take a more decisive position during the sin of the Golden Calf. When the nation arose against him, clamoring for a replacement for Moshe *Rabbeinu*, he stalled for time. He did not rebuke them for their outrageous behavior and impossible demands. Indeed, when Moshe *Rabbeinu* confronted Aharon, he asked, "What suffering did they impose on you to force you to do it to them?" *Ramban* goes so far as to interpret Moshe's critique to mean, "What did they do to cause you to hate them, so that you did this to them?" The other commentators, each in his inimitable manner, present a scathing objection to Aharon's allowing the people to carry out the sin – without putting up a fight.

These disapprovals are all relative to Aharon's lofty spiritual stature, and Aharon, indeed, had his reasons, which he expressed to Moshe. He put the sin into perspective, claiming that it was the result of hundreds of years of Jewish exposure to Egypt idolatry. Yet, Moshe refused to back off.

We are being presented with two diverse personalities, two very different natures, and two opposing perspectives on how to deal with the issue of this first communal sin. Aharon demonstrated his consummate love for the Jewish People. *Ohaiv shalom v'rodef shalom*, "Lover of peace and pursuer of peace," were his unique qualities which earned the *Kesser Kehunah* for him.

As *Kohen Gadol*, his mission went beyond creating harmony among his fellow man. His focus now was *bein Yisrael l'Avinu she'ba'Shomayim*, "Between Klal Yisrael and Our Father in Heaven." One quality he lacked was the dominating nature, the forcefulness and defiance, which a *melech*, king, must have in order to lead. When dealing with people, *rachamim*, compassion, is the character trait that must override all others. A king, however, must be reserved and strong. His decisions must be disciplined and guided by strict justice. A king must address the bigger picture and all of the far-reaching ramifications of his decision. He would like to show compassion, but compassion for one person can spell tragedy for another. Prior to rendering a decision, the king must take all of this into the equation.

Once Aharon deferred to the Golden Calf sinners, it left a blemish on the entire family of *Kohanim*. Since the *Leviim* are subservient to the *Kohanim*, the entire *shevet Levi* was disqualified from monarchy. Rav Heiman posits that the distinction between *Malchus* and *Kehunah* is behind the reason that Moshe's name is deleted from *Parashas Tetzaveh*. From the beginning of *Sefer Shemos* until the end of the Torah, Moshe's name is found in every *parsha* – except for *Parashas Tetzaveh*. The commentators cite various reasons for this. Rav Heiman explains that *Parashas Tetzaveh* is all about the *Kehunah* and the appointment of Aharon as its leader. By excluding Moshe from the *parsha*, the Torah is alluding that *Malchus* and *Kehunah* should be distinct from one another.

From the above, it seems that Aharon was passive in his resistance to Moshe. Aharon loved Jews and, as a result, he could not stand up to them. The *Midrash*, however, presents the first *Kohen Gadol* in a completely different light. While the simple reading of the Torah's narrative in *Parashas Ki Sisa* implies that when Moshe descended from *Har Sinai*, he saw the spiritual rebellion against Hashem and proceeded to smash the *Luchos*, *Chazal* do not seem to think so. Indeed, they portray a totally different scenario. Apparently, there was a serious dispute between Aharon and the elders on one side and Moshe *Rabbeinu* on the other. Moshe contended that a nation of idol worshippers did not deserve the *Luchos*. They were too obsessed with the Golden Calf to desire Hashem. Thus, the Tablets had to be destroyed. This nation had no interest in the *Luchos*. Aharon and the *Zekeinim* disputed this. The Jews should be given another chance. After experiencing so much pain, hundreds of years of brutal slavery, they were now in no condition to reject the blandishments of the *yetzer hora*.

Their dispute did not stop with words. Aharon and the *Zekeinim* took hold of the *Luchos* and attempted to wrest them from Moshe's hands. Moshe persevered and triumphed over them, grabbing hold of the *Luchos* and smashing them. **Horav Avraham Pam, zl**, as quoted by *Horav Yissocher Frand, Shlita*, explains the "dialogue" that ensued between these spiritual giants. Aharon and the Elders screamed, "Moshe! You are wrong! True, they are presently worshipping what seems to be an idol, but we can work with them. Give us a chance to show them the error of their ways, to enlighten them in our Torah. Breaking the *Luchos* is an act of finality. They cannot be resurrected. Please!" Moshe did not listen. He broke the *Luchos*.

Despite contending against a majority of dissenting opinions, regardless of the logic of the majority's position, ignoring the emotion that also sided with them – Moshe acted with conviction and, perhaps, audacity. He made a decision based upon a *kal v'chomer*, a priori logical argument. Concerning the *Pesach* offering the Torah writes, *Kol ben neichar lo yochal bo*, "Anyone estranged from Judaism (a *mumar*) is not permitted to partake of it" (*Shemos* 12:43). This is only one *mitzvah*. Certainly, one who has abandoned Judaism cannot receive the entire Torah.

Tosfos questions Moshe's logic. While it is true that one who has abandoned Judaism has no business eating the *Korban Pesach*, had the Jews received the Torah, they might have repented. They certainly deserved a chance to prove themselves. This is rule number one in Jewish outreach: Everybody deserves a chance.

Rav Pam explains that it was Moshe's *daas Torah*, wisdom derived from the Torah that impelled him to render the unequivocal decision to break the *Luchos*. Our quintessential leader intuitively felt that he needed to display discipline at this most critical juncture in our nation's formation. A foundation that is weak will not endure. A foundation based on compromise is weak. There can be flexibility with the "branches," but the "trunk" must be solid. This was Moshe's finest moment. It defined him, and ultimately set the standards for *Klal Yisrael's* future. Aharon had his *derech*, approach, which was supported by popular opinion. Moshe, however, as *melech*, superseded their opinion. Hashem agreed with Moshe.

The mark of a *gadol b'Yisrael* is his greatness as a Torah giant. He is magnified in stature, not only in his erudition, but in every aspect of his moral/spiritual refinement. A giant is not simply taller than the average man; his every organ is larger than that of others. A *gadol* represents the true Torah monarch. His *daas Torah* reflects an insight based upon wisdom gleaned from Torah scholarship, the result of toil, diligence and sacrifice. Scholarship in conjunction with consummate spiritual integrity and total devotion to the Jewish nation are the traits that constitute a *gadol*. In addition, he brooks no compromise in his faith and adherence to the laws of Torah. He fears no man; his devotion is only to Hashem. **Horav Aharon Kotler, zl**, the individual who set the standard for uncompromised Torah study in America, was such a *gadol*.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* of Beth Medrash Govohah worked with selfless devotion to promote Torah and its values. He was challenged by a world of ignorance and apathy. He was attacked by Torah Judaism's overt enemies, but that was to be expected. The discreet and often subtle diatribe that emanated from those too weak to stand up to the forces were determined to secularize Judaism and distance it from Hashem. *Rav Aharon* was unafraid of neither Torah's declared enemies, nor of their spineless followers. Indeed, it was on the backs of these vacillating sycophants that the secular stream, whom the *Rosh Yeshivah* referred to as "counterfeiters of Torah," made inroads into Orthodoxy.

Rav Aharon demonstrated how, by extending religious status to the secular groups who two centuries earlier had broken away from the Torah camp and from Hashem, the very foundation of

Torah was being impugned. He played a critical role in the historic *psak*, *halachic* decision, condemning membership in any organization which granted equal status to any stream of Judaism which was not Torah oriented. This *psak* barred Orthodox rabbis from participating in mixed religious organizations.

He would argue, "Can you imagine, doctors dedicated to eradicating a disease joining a group that spreads the sickness? It is inconceivable to build Judaism, while recognizing the legitimacy of those who deny the Torah."

Regrettably, the *Rosh Yeshivah's* opinion was not shared by all. Some differed philosophically; others were simply too weak to stand up to the rising pressures of those who were content with being *poseiach al shtei ha'se'ifiim*, "dancing between two opinions." While the situation has not been expunged, thanks to *Rav Aharon*, whose piercing eyes saw the truth, a new Torah consciousness was aroused which continues to grow stronger with each passing day.