

Bnei Yisrael bewailed Moshe. (34:8)

Rashi notes that only the men wept for Moshe. This is indicated by the term Bnei Yisrael, sons of Yisrael, implying the male population. In recording the death of Aharon HaKohen, however, the Torah writes, “the entire House of Yisrael [wept for him]” (Bamidbar 20:29), which includes both men and women. Rashi explains that Aharon loved and pursued peace, creating harmony between husband and wife and man and his fellowman. His relationship with the common man was more “common.” He was constantly with them, promoting peace. As the king, leader and quintessential rebbe of the entire Jewish People, the relationship of Moshe Rabbeinu to the Jewish People was intrinsically more “aloof.”

The Midrash presents another reason for the disparity in the people’s mourning for Moshe versus their mourning for Aharon. Moshe had a responsibility to reprimand the people vehemently when necessary. As the lawgiver, he pronounced the commands and admonitions that kept the nation in line. Aharon, on the other hand, was the agent who provided atonement, whose role it was to catalyze forgiveness for the sins of the Jewish People. Thus, the people felt a natural degree of affection towards him and, thus, a greater sense of loss with his passing.

According to the above explanations, the nation did not mourn for Moshe with the same degree of intensity as they did for Aharon, because they were not as “close” to Moshe as they were to Aharon. Ibn Ezra, as well as Chizkuni, adds a novel explanation which illuminates for us the mystery surrounding the nation’s lack of intensity in mourning for Moshe Rabbeinu. They write that when Aharon died, the nation grieved along with Moshe. They empathized with his pain and felt his grief. They wept for “Aharon” as a result of the esteem in which they held Moshe. In other words, when Aharon died, the nation mourned for Moshe. When Moshe died, however, there was no one left for whom to mourn. We do not mourn for the deceased. The neshamah, soul, is now in a different world, a better world. It has returned to its source. We weep for the living.

We might suggest that the closing words of the Torah, l’eini kol Yisrael, “before the eyes of all Yisrael” (34:12) alludes to the reason that the people were not overcome with grief at Moshe’s passing. Moshe acted in Hashem’s Name before the eyes of an entire nation. He acted in plain view, without ambiguity; nothing was shrouded in mystery. Moshe stood at Har Sinai, and before the eyes of all gave them the Torah. His memory remains forever attached synonymously to the Torah which he received from Hashem. From that point on, it was called Toras Moshe. Klal Yisrael

will never forget Moshe, because his incomparable personality continues to inspire and influence them through the immortal Torah to which he is so strongly linked. Moshe Rabbeinu continues to be a vibrant, living, palpable force in our lives today, as he was thousands of years ago when he stood before Hashem and His People on Har Sinai: Yes, Moshe is very much alive today.