



## משה ואהרן Moshe and Aharon

### ■ Chronology in the Torah

One of the cardinal rules in the methodology of the written Torah is that when two names are mentioned consecutively, the first-mentioned is more important than the second one. But what happens if neither of them is actually more important? One of them must still be listed first! Chazal therefore stated that if the Torah occasionally reverses the order of two names, even only once, it means that the two people are equal in stature.

An example is the commandments of honoring our parents and holding them in awe. The Medrash states:

**The Torah always states the obligation to honor the father before the mother – except for once, when it states: איש אמו ואביו תיראו, *a man must fear his mother and father* (Vayikra 19,3), teaching us that the two parents are equivalent to each other. (B'reshit Rabba 1,15)**

Let us analyze one word in the above teaching. The Medrash does not state that the two parents are *shavim*, “equal” to each other, but rather that they are *sh'kulim*, balanced with each other, meaning that they are “equivalent.” That is to say, they are different, and each has an advantage over the other in one or more respects, but the bottom line is that they are equivalent.

Let us proceed in the above Medrash:

**Moshe is always mentioned before Aharon - except for once, when the Torah states: *that is Aharon and Moshe*, teaching us that the two of them are equivalent to each other.**

When is Aharon mentioned before Moshe? The Medrash is referring to this verse:

הוא אַהֲרֹן וּמֹשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר אָמַר ה' לָהֶם,  
הוֹצִיאוּ אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עַל צְבָאוֹתָם.  
*That is Aharon and Moshe, to whom G-d said,  
"Take the children of Israel out of the land  
of Egypt with their legions."* (Sh'mot 6,26)

The verse after it reverts to the Torah's usual form and lists Moshe before Aharon:

הֵם הַמְדַבְּרִים אֶל פַּרְעֹה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לְהוֹצִיא אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם,  
הוא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן.  
*They are the speakers to Pharaoh,  
the king of Egypt, to let the children of Israel out of Egypt;  
they are Moshe and Aharon.* (verse 27)

When we look at these two verses describing the roles of Moshe and Aharon, a difficulty arises: They emphasize the wrong roles for each! Regarding Aharon, we know that because of his speaking skills, he was to be the spokesman towards both Israel and Pharaoh. G-d had told Moshe that Aharon *"will serve as your mouth, and you will be his leader"* (Sh'mot 4,16). On the other hand, the mission of the Master of Prophets, Moshe Rabbeinu, was to prophetically hear G-d's message and transmit it to Aharon.

Why, then, does verse 26, which discusses G-d's message, mention Aharon before Moshe, when it was Moshe who was in direct contact with Hashem? And why does verse 27, which refers to their relationship to Pharaoh, mention Moshe before Aharon, if Aharon was responsible for talking to the king?

### ■ When Kindness and Truth Meet

Before we approach this difficulty, let us look at Parashat Sh'mot. Immediately after the prophetic revelation to Moshe at the Burning Bush, we read: *"G-d said to Aharon: 'Go towards Moshe in the desert.' He went and met him at the Mountain of G-d, and kissed him"* (Sh'mot 4,27). The meeting between the two brothers was one of two different worlds that supplemented and complemented each other. The Medrash describes their encounter by quoting a verse from Psalms, which appears to refer precisely to this meeting: *"Kindness and truth meet; justice and peace kiss"* (Psalms 85,11). The Medrash explains (Sh'mot Rabba 5):

*Kindness* refers to Aharon, as is written,  
 “*Your Tumim and Urim* [the Priest’s Breastplate] *to Your man of kindness*” (D’varim 33,8),

while *truth* refers to Moshe, as is written,  
 “*He is trustworthy throughout My entire house*” (Bamidbar 12,7).

That is to say, this meeting between the brothers is a meeting of Aharon’s world of kindness and Moshe’s world of truth. The “world of kindness” creates a comfortable atmosphere between people and encourages mutual support and consideration. This is why Aharon’s communication with the nation was so naturally flowing and pleasant.

On the other hand, Moshe’s “world of truth” enables dialogue between man and his Creator, Who is the only absolute truth. This explains why the dialogue between Hashem and Moshe flowed freely with no difficulty.

The Medrash continues:

*Justice* refers to Moshe, as is written,  
 “*G-d’s justice he [Moshe] performed*” (D’varim 33,21),

while *peace* refers to Aharon, as is written,  
 “*In peace and equity he walked with Me*” (Malachi 2,6).

Moshe Rabbeinu represents the world of justice and law, and Aharon stands for harmony. Our Sages taught (Sanhedrin 6b) that Moshe’s approach was “let the law bore through the mountain,” meaning there should be no compromise, while Aharon was famous for “loving peace and pursuing peace.”

Let us now return to the verse in Psalms, which discusses two meetings: *Kindness and truth*, followed by *justice and peace*. We can read it as follows: *Kindness and truth* – Aharon and Moshe, followed by *justice and peace* – Moshe and Aharon. Aharon is first in the first pair, and Moshe is first in the second pair. That is to say, kindness initiates the meeting with truth, while justice actively kisses peace.

We find the same structure in the two consecutive verses in Sh’mot: Aharon-Moshe first (6,26), then Moshe-Aharon (6,27).

And just as the verse in Psalms mentions two types of encounters – meeting and kissing – the same applies to the description of the meeting between Moshe and Aharon:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַהֲרֹן, לֵךְ לִקְרַאת מֹשֶׁה הַמִּדְבָּרָה.  
וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיִּפְגְּשֵׁהוּ בְּהַר הָאֱ-לֹהִים וַיִּשָּׂק לוֹ.

*G-d said to Aharon: "Go towards Moshe [in] the desert."  
So he went and met [Moshe] at the Mountain of G-d,  
and he [Moshe] kissed him [Aharon]. (Sh'mot 4,27)*

Just as the verse in Psalms states that *Kindness meets truth*, so too, Aharon initiates the meeting with Moshe; and just as *justice kisses peace*, Moshe kisses Aharon.

### ■ The Consequences of Separation

Moshe and Aharon work together throughout nearly the entire process of rescuing the Nation of Israel from Egypt; kindness and truth lead together. But what happens during the few times that each of them is on his own?

Let us see what happened when Moshe returned from Midian to Egypt, alone, even before he met his brother Aharon: *"On his way, where he rested, Hashem [an angel] met him and sought to kill him"* (Sh'mot 4,24). A most strange incident, which the next verses tell us occurred because Moshe did not circumcise his son Eliezer. Does that warrant Moshe's death sentence?!

We must remember that later on, before the Exodus from Egypt, G-d delivered a very clear injunction regarding the Pesach sacrifice: *"One who is uncircumcised may not eat from it"* (Sh'mot 12,48). It is inconceivable that an Israelite on his way to the forging of the Eternal Covenant between Israel and its G-d will not have fulfilled the prerequisite Avrahamic Covenant – the circumcision that represents the covenant (*brit*) between every individual Jew and Hashem.

Moreover: The angel who sought to kill Moshe was simply implementing a Biblical warning: *"One who does not circumcise himself, his soul will be cut off from his nation."* (B'reshit 17,14)

Therefore, when truth stands alone, as represented by Moshe on his solitary way back to Egypt, without the kindness and compassion of Aharon to "soften" things up, it is like a burning fire – and Moshe was nearly consumed by it.

On the other hand, when Moshe ascended Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, Aharon was left on his own with the Children of Israel – and he ended up failing to stand up to a few thousand sinners who wished to worship the Golden Calf. This happened because the attribute of truth was

not there with him to stem the onslaught in the wake of Aharon's ever-present kindness and peace.

### ■ **Brotherly Love and Support**

Another expression of the love and cooperation between Moshe and Aharon is found in the Psalms of King David:

הִנֵּה מָה טוֹב וְיָמָה נְעִים שָׁבֶת אֲחִים גַּם יַחַד...

*How good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together.*

*As the good oil on the head runs down upon the beard,*

*- the beard of Aharon...* (Psalms 133,1-2)

The brothers mentioned here are Moshe and Aharon. Their relationship is compared to the joining of the head - the intellect - with the emotions of the heart. The verse describes how the special oil used to anoint kings on their head trickles down from the head to the beard – and from there to the heart.

Moshe Rabbeinu is the brain, leading Israel via the Torah, and Aharon the Priest is the heart, the one who senses the pulse of the nation. Aharon does so via the precious stones of the Hoshen Mishpat, the priestly breastplate he wears over his *heart* (Sh'mot 28,30) and on which are engraved the names of the Tribes of Israel.

Moshe and Aharon, well aware of how they complement and supplement each other, treat each other with the utmost respect and honor. The Mechilta Halakhic Medrash brings this out on the following verse in Parashat Bo:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אַהֲרֹן בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר.

דַּבְּרוּ אֵל כָּל עֵדֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל...

*Hashem said to Moshe and Aharon in Egypt: ...*

*“Speak [plural] to the congregation of Israel...”* (Sh'mot 12,1-3)

The Mechilta asks:

Could it be that *both* of them spoke?... Rather, Rabi Shimon ben Yochai explains: Moshe accorded honor to Aharon and asked him, ‘Please teach me.’ Aharon, too, accorded honor to Moshe and asked him, ‘Please teach me.’ The Divine voice would then emerge from between them, as if both of them were speaking.” (Mechilta D’Rabbi Yishmael, Bo, 2,3)

Rabi Shimon ben Yochai teaches us a very important concept: The blessing and benefit that can be garnered from opposing forces is *dependent upon the extent of mutual respect between the two*. Mutual appreciation is a prerequisite for the two sides to be able to supplement each other productively.

### ■ Father and Mother

Another example that depicts this approach is taught in the Gemara:

**Three partners take part in the formation of a person: Hashem, the father, and the mother. When a person honors his father and mother, Hashem says: “I consider it as if I had lived amongst them and they honored Me.”** (Kiddushin 30b)

What is the Gemara alluding to when it says G-d lives amongst “them”? And why does the Gemara seemingly refer only to the parents, and not to their son, in saying it is as if “they” honored G-d?

The Gemara is teaching us that when parents wish to educate their children to honor them, they themselves must honor and respect each other. When they do so, the distinctive letters of their Hebrew words – the *yud* in איש, man, and the *heh* in אשה, woman – come together to form G-d’s name of *yud-heh* (pronounced *yud-keh*, so as not to utter G-d’s Holy Name). The Medrash means that when parents honor each other, causing their children to honor them, they thus honor Hashem.

Let us now apply this to the Nation of Israel. First of all, the formation of Israel is parallel to the formation of a person, as is written:

וְאַתֶּן צֹאֲנֵי צֹאן מְרֻעֵיתִי אָדָם אֲתֶם...

*You are My flock, the flock of My pasture;*

*you are man ...* (Yechezkel 34,31)

And just like when a man is created there are three partners, so, too, with Israel: G-d, Moshe, and Aharon. The correct combination of Aharon’s kindness and compassion with Moshe’s truth and justice is akin to the revelation of G-d’s glory. The respect that Moshe and Aharon feel and show for each other brings the nation to respect them as well, and in this merit, the Divine Presence dwells in their midst.

When the Torah sages and leaders of each generation respect and honor each other, the entire nation respects them – and thus honors G-d.

In the continuation of the above Talmudic passage, we find an answer to the question we asked regarding the seeming confusion in Moshe and Aharon's roles:

**Rebbe says: It is clear and known to Him Who created the world with His words that a son shows more honor to his mother than to his father, because she speaks nicely to him; this is why the Torah wrote *Honor your father before your mother.* (Sh'mot 20,12)**

**And it is [similarly] clear to Him Who spoke and created the world that a son fears his father more than his mother, because he teaches him Torah; this is why the Torah wrote (Vayikra 19,3) that one must fear his mother before stating that one must fear his father.**

The Gemara is telling us that the Torah tends to stress the weaker aspect by mentioning it first. This explains why the Torah mentioned Aharon first in the verse having to do with receiving G-d's message, and listed Moshe first in the passage regarding communicating it. In each case, the "weaker" aspect is listed first, strongly validating both Aharon's prophecies and Moshe's communication skills.

### ■ **Setting the Stage**

Delving even deeper, we will see how justice and compassion are intertwined in the preparations for rescuing the Children of Israel from Egypt. When the Torah first sets the stage for the great Exodus, it explains Israel's dire situation by alternating between the concepts of compassion and justice. The passage begins:

וַיִּאָנְחוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן הָעֲבֹדָה וַיִּזְעְקוּ וַתַּעַל שְׁוַעֲתָם אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים מִן הָעֲבֹדָה. וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת נַאֲקָתָם...

*The Children of Israel groaned from the hard work,  
and cried out; their plea rose up to G-d,  
and He heard their wailing...* (Sh'mot 2,23-24)

From these verses we hear the voice of compassion for the suffering nation. But the next words deal with justice – implying that G-d “owes” us a rescue:

וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת בְּרִיתוֹ אֶת אַבְרָהָם אֶת יִצְחָק וְאֶת יַעֲקֹב.  
*G-d remembered His covenant with Avraham,  
Yitzchak and Yaakov.*

Hashem had vowed to our Forefathers that He would redeem their children,

and He is obligated, according to the rules of justice and truth, to fulfill His commitment. Finally, the last verse in this series once again concentrates on compassion and mercy:

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וַיֵּדַע אֱלֹהִים.  
*G-d saw [the suffering of] the Children of Israel,  
 and He knew [and recognized their pain].* (verse 25)

In short, there are three stages: Compassion, Justice, Compassion.

When G-d later turns to Moshe and assigns him the mission of saving Israel from Egypt, He mentions only their pain and suffering, and omits the aspect of justice: *“Hashem said: I have surely seen the torture of My nation in Egypt, and their cry I have heard... for I know their pain.”* (3,7)

But Moshe, as we know, refuses the mission. Infused with the trait of justice, he cannot agree to save Israel based only on compassion and not on truth. He senses that compassion might be transient, while justice lasts forever.

Incidentally, Moshe's sense of justice is brought out very clearly in the fact that the Torah recounts three incidents in Parashat Sh'mot in which he stands up to injustice. The first one was when he struck an Egyptian who attacked a Hebrew man. The second incident was when he sought to act against a wicked Hebrew assaulting his brother Jew. The third was when he refused to allow even inter-Gentile injustice, when Midianite shepherds did not let their fellow Midianite girls draw water.

Finally, following a long exchange with Moshe, Hashem agrees to include Aharon, who would bring the trait of compassion and kindness to the mission. Since Aharon's traits are to be dominant, he is to be the spokesman. Aharon agrees immediately, and does not argue with Hashem as Moshe did – for kindness and peace are Aharon's trademark characteristics.

Therefore, in Parashat Sh'mot, Aharon is the more active one: *“Moshe and Aharon went and gathered all the elders of the Children of Israel. Aharon then told [them] all that G-d had spoken to Moshe.”* (Sh'mot 4,29-30)

What was Israel's reaction? *“The people believed, and heard that G-d had remembered Israel and saw their suffering; and they bowed down.”* (verse 31)

In Va'era, however, the opposite process takes place. Instead of seeing kindness/justice/kindness, we see justice/kindness/justice. The Covenant, whose fulfillment justice demands, is mentioned first:

וַאֲרָא אֶל אַבְרָהָם ... וְגַם הִקְמוּתִי אֶת בְּרִיתִי אִתְּם  
 לְתֵת לָהֶם אֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן...  
*And I appeared to Avraham...  
 and I also established My Covenant with them  
 to give them the Land of Canaan...*

It then continues with G-d's compassion:

וְגַם אָנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת נַאֲקַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר מִצְרַיִם מִעֲבָדִים אִתָּם;  
*I heard the cries of the Children of Israel, being enslaved by Egypt;*

and concludes with another mention of the Covenant:

וְאֶזְכֹּר אֶת בְּרִיתִי.  
*And I remembered My Covenant.* (Sh'mot 6,4-5)

We see that here, the trait of justice is dominant! Since this jibes more with Moshe's approach than Aharon's, Moshe is the speaker, as we read: *"Moshe spoke thus to Bnei Yisrael."* (verse 9)

And what was the reaction of Bnei Yisrael this time? The verse continues: *"They did not heed Moshe, because of their broken spirit and hard work."* The nation cannot deal with exclusive emphasis on strict justice, the trait characterized by Moshe Rabbeinu. In addition, when Aharon spoke and they accepted his words, he gave them only words of solace and comfort. Here, however, Moshe adds a Divine challenge, one that makes significant demands upon them:

וְלִקְחֹתִי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעַם וְהִיִּיתִי לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים...  
*I will take you unto Me as a nation,  
 and I will be your G-d...*(verse 7)

The Children of Israel were apparently not ready at this time to take upon themselves such obligations, and they were unable to accept Moshe's message.

In Parashat Bo, yet another stage in the process is revealed:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אֶהֱרֹן בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר...  
 דַּבְּרוּ אֶל כָּל עַדְת יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר.  
 בְּעֶשְׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם אִישׁ שָׂה לְבַיִת אָבוֹת שָׂה לְבַיִת.

*Hashem said to Moshe and Aharon in Egypt:  
... Speak [plural] to the entire congregation of Israel,  
saying: On the tenth day of this month,  
they shall take for themselves one sheep for each home.* (Sh'mot 12,1-3)

This is the stage of practical commandments. For the first time, the Torah is issuing commandments to the nation, and what is required is the partnership of Moshe and Aharon – both of them together. When this occurs, how do Bnei Yisrael react? *“The people bowed down, and went and did as G-d had commanded Moshe and Aharon.”* (Sh'mot 12,27-28)

When Moshe and Aharon appear together and speak jointly, with their customary mutual respect and honor, the nation reacts in kind, honoring and trusting their message. The result is then guaranteed to be the precise implementation of G-d's word.

