

Sibling Rivalry

Category: Shemos, Va'eira

When G-d appoints Aaron and Moses to lead the Jewish people together, it seems like a recipe for disaster. Why did G-d choose to do so? And how did it work out?

The Rabbi-Partners

Have you ever heard two Rabbis in one synagogue? Maybe an assistant Rabbi as well as a full Rabbi, but two Rabbis? Every successful organization or country usually has only one manager, one head. In the United States it's the president, in Israel the Prime Minister; they make the final decision. Businesses with two partners often experience conflict.

In the exodus from Egypt we find this idea turned on its head. There are two leaders: Moses and Aaron. At first Moses was appointed sole leader, but nearly immediately G-d appointed Aaron to speak for him. "He will be for you a mouth and you will be his leader."

If only a translator was needed, someone could have been hired for \$20 an hour. So why was Aaron needed? Looking at the text we see that before Aaron and Moses went to Pharaoh, G-d said, "I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and I will show you what you will do". Both of them were to take the Jewish people out of Egypt. This seems like a recipe for conflict.

In another case of leadership, when Moses—before his passing—appointed Joshua as leader, Rashi comments that "Moses said to Joshua 'the elders of the generation shall be with you. Everything should be done according to their opinion and advice'. But G-d said to Joshua 'for you shall bring the Children of Israel to the land that I have sworn to them.... Everything depends on you... There is one leader for a generation and not two leaders for a generation" (Deuteronomy 31:7).

Yet, in the generation of Moses, G-d Himself appointed two leaders.

In the verses relating to Aaron and Moses, we see the Torah relates to them as

one person. In Parshat Shemot (4:29), the verse says, “And Moshe & Aaron went.” It does not say “and they went” in the plural, but in the singular. (In English, plural and singular verbs are often the same, but in Hebrew it is almost always different, which is often lost in translation).

This pattern of grammar continues for the next 40 years. When the Torah talks about Moses and Aaron they are often addressed in the singular. In our parsha (6:27), we find the following: “They are speaking to Pharaoh...he—Moses and Aaron”; the conjugation changes from the plural to the singular. Immediately afterwards, “And Moses and Aaron did (singular) as G-d had commanded, so they did” (7:6). The conjugation switches from singular to the plural.

In Parshat Shelach, when the spies gathered the Jewish people against Moses and Aaron, “And he fell Moses and Aaron on their faces” (Numbers 14:5) again we see the singular conjugation. Finally, in Parshat Chukat, at the end of their lives, when Moses hit the rock, Aaron is punished with him: “And G-d said to Moses and Aaron ‘because you did not believe in me...therefore you will not go in.’”

A History of Sibling Rivalry

Why did G-d choose to change the usual pattern of a single leader?

To understand this, let us look at the cause of the Egyptian exile. The descent into Egypt was the result of the argument between Joseph and his brothers over the position of Joseph in the family.

Interesting enough, sibling rivalry is found way back in the beginning of time – with Cain and Abel. Cain, the older did not want his younger brother to outdo him. Then comes the case of Isaac and Ishmael, where Ishmael could not tolerate Isaac being given preference to him. Then comes the conflict between Jacob and Esau, in which Esau (the firstborn) refused to accept the superiority of his younger brother, Jacob.

With Isaac and Ishmael, the cause could be an ‘ideological conflict.’ Ishmael was an idol worshipper and Isaac believed in one G-d. In the case of Jacob and Esau, one was wicked and one was righteous. But Joseph and his brothers shared the same belief in one G-d, so there were no grounds for the conflict. It was this conflict that caused the Egyptian exile.

The Rebbe would often say that since our present exile was caused by unjustifiable hatred, in order to end the exile we need to involve ourselves with gratuitous love. Because the cause of the Egyptian exile was the 'hatred of brothers', therefore, in order to bring the redemption, the opposite had to happen. In other words, two brothers together had to take the nation out of Egypt and become so united that they turned into one entity.

Even more so, the older brother, Aaron had to willingly accept the authority of the younger brother, Moses.

The Zohar states that Moses and Aaron were two parts of one body, and only because of this could they succeed in taking the Jewish nation out of Egypt.

Moses and Aaron never had a division of opinion even though their natures were opposite; Moses' nature was Gevurah, strictness, and justice, while Aaron's was Chesed, kindness and love. King David said about their relationship, "Kindness and truth met, righteousness and peace kissed" (Psalms 64, 11).

Learn to Think the Same

Why didn't Moses and Aaron ever contradict one another?

The case of a long-married couple may provide the answers to our question. After living together for years, they know each other so well they can predict how the other half will react, what pleases them, angers them, and even what words they will use.

It is the same with Chassidim and their Rebbe. A true Chassid is one who knows in advance what the Rebbe will respond to any situation. He has learned to think like the Rebbe and therefore, without checking in the Rebbe's books or asking the Rebbe, he is able to tune in to the will of the Rebbe.

Aaron too, had such a connection to Moses, that he knew intuitively what Moses wanted.

What's the lesson for us? We want to prepare our children for the journey of life, but it's impossible to give them the answer to all the dilemmas that will be presented to them in their lifetimes. What we could do is to train them to think in a Jewish manner, and then they can react like the Torah wants them to react. It is

not enough to 'act Jewish', or 'speak Jewish'; one must learn how to 'think Jewish.'