

Small Tastings of Torah, Judaism and Spirituality

From Rav Binny

(Portion of Tetzaveh)

Seven years ago, on 5 Adar I, 5776, one of modern Israel's greatest war heroes, Yanosh ben Gal, was laid to rest in the military cemetery in Givat Shaul. To honor his memory, this story is reprinted from a previous article:

As the summer of nineteen seventy three wound down, the seventh armored brigade was stationed on the Bar Lev line, on the border with Egypt along the Suez Canal.

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah, the brigade was given a week's leave for the holidays. As the men of the seventh headed off for some R&R all over the country, Yanosh, the brigade commander, stopped off on his way home at the General Staff base in Tel Aviv; an ingrained habit to keep abreast of the intelligence reports.

What he saw alarmed him: Egyptian and Syrian troop buildups along the Canal and in the Golan Heights, a high increase of Arab military radio traffic, and an unusual amount of activity in the Arab airfields. Two weeks before that fateful Yom Kippur, Yanosh became convinced the country was headed for war. He immediately went to the Central Command radio room and put in a call to his Division Commander, advising him of his opinion, and asking for a first-stage general call up of critical reserves, and the recall of all the troops that had been given leave that very afternoon.

But that is a lot of work, and intelligence reports can be interpreted in different ways, so the Division Commander disagreed. Yanosh had somewhat of a reputation as an impulsive firebrand, and didn't give up easily. Convinced as he was that his country was in grave danger, and going over his Commander's head, he eventually appealed to the Chief of General Staff himself, Commander of the entire Israeli army at the time, Dado Elazar.

But no one wanted to listen; flushed with the success of the 67' war, when Israeli forces had wiped out the much larger Arab armies facing them, no one seemed capable of imagining that these same Arab armies might be poised to destroy the State of Israel, and so the phone calls were not made, the highways remained silent, and Israeli troops going on leave continued to depart for the holidays.

In retrospect, one opinion in the intelligence community was that the Arabs wanted to see over the Rosh Hashanah holiday, whether a major troop buildup would cause the Israelis to keep more troops on alert. The results were the last stage of the Arab decision to go to war, and the Israelis were still sleeping....

Yanosh finally concluded no one was listening, but the continued reports of major troop buildups would not allow him to let it go. Finally, he decided that at the very least he commanded his own Brigade and that was better than nothing. The situation in the North, along the Golan Heights was in one respect, much more tenuous than in the South, as there was no buffer zone in the North. If Yanosh was right, and Egyptian troops came pouring across the Suez Canal, at least they would still have hundreds of kilometers of desert to negotiate before arriving at Israeli cities and towns. In the Golan, a couple of hours on tank treads from Haifa, Israel had no such luxury.

So Yanosh decided to rotate his brigade up North to the Golan Heights, and eventually, figuring it would be easier for them, the High Command acquiesced.

Recalling an entire Brigade, spread out on holiday leave all over the country, getting them all the way down to the southern tip of the Sinai, and then transferring an entire armored Brigade the length of the country north up into the Golan heights was no easy task. Everyone thought Yanosh was mad, and the move did not bolster his image in the eyes of his men, who had just lost a week's leave. But this single Brigade Commander's determination and conviction brought an entire Brigade on line in the North, three days before the outbreak of the Yom Kippur war. And when two thousand Syrian tanks poured across the border on the afternoon of October sixth, 1973, instead of seventy-five tanks (of the 188th), there were one hundred and fifty on line, something that made all the difference.

This week's portion *Tetzaveh*, introduces one of Judaism's central roles: that of the Kohein; the priest.

"Ve'atah hakrev eilecha et Aharon Achicha, ve'et banav ito, mitoch B'nei Yisrael, le'chahano' li; Aharon, Nadav ve'Avihu, Elazar ve'Itamar, b'nei Aharon."

"And you (Moshe) shall bring close to you Aaron your brother, and his sons, from amongst the Children of Israel to serve as Priests to Me: Aharon, Nadav, Avihu, Elazar and Itamar, the sons of Aharon." (Shemot (Exodus) 28:1)

Interestingly, as is well known, this is the only portion in the entire Torah (since his birth) that sees no mention of Moshe's name. Yet Aharon's name is mentioned no less than three times in just this one verse.

This is the portion of the introduction of the role of the Kohein, the Priest, and the ascendancy of Moshe's brother Aharon.

It would not have been surprising to sense some sibling rivalry or even healthy competition hidden between the lines, as Moshe, sole arbiter of power and dispenser of justice will now have to share the leadership of the Jewish people with his immensely popular brother. (Note that Moshe is commanded to bring his brother close "from amongst the Children of Israel" ...)

Indeed, **Rashi** on the verse notes that Aharon and his sons are only introduced as *Kohanim* (Priests) once Moshe had concluded overseeing the project of the building of the *Mishkan* (the Tabernacle). So Moshe has to build it, but his brother Aharon will run it. Further, Aharon's sons will become Priests as well, introducing the exclusive priestly lineage, whereas Moshe's sons will never attain any similar status, disappearing into the anonymity reserved for great leader's sons.

In fact, once Aharon is conscripted as the High Priest and the *Mishkan* is dedicated, Moshe will no longer even be allowed to enter the holiest place in Judaism! Surely, this is the stuff jealousy and sibling rivalries are made of, and yet nothing could be further from the truth. Throughout the forty years in the desert, Hashem (G-d) will speak sometimes to Moshe and sometimes to Aharon, and sometimes to both of them, yet one will never sense tension between the brothers.

Even when Moshe descends from Sinai and finds Aharon right in the middle of the sin of the Golden Calf (*Shemot* 32:21-22), a golden opportunity to ascribe blame and disempower Aharon if ever there was one, he *asks* Aharon what the people have done, never ascribing any blame to Aharon himself.

And when Moshe eighty days later returns with the second tablets (ibid. 34:30) the Torah describes Aharon and the entire Jewish people seeing Moshe's radiant face, without a hint of angst or jealousy.

Rav Yoshe Ber Soleveitchik (in a magnificent article reprinted in English in Rav Moshe Besdin's *Reflections of the Rav*) suggests that Moshe and Aharon represent the two primary educational leadership roles in Judaism, and while they do not compete with each other, they are in fact very different.

Moshe finds himself atop Mount Sinai; speaking directly to G-d and far away from the people when the Sin of the Golden calf occurs. Aharon on the other hand is below, right in the thick of it all. When Moshe comes down from the mountain his face glows and he needs to wear a veil; he removes himself from the camp and has a somewhat distant, and even authoritarian relationship with the people. Aharon on the other hand, even at the beginning of his journey into the priesthood is always 'amongst the people'. Indeed, the *Mishna* in *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers) exhorts us to '*be of the students of Aharon: Ohev Shalom ve'rodef shalom*': he who loves and pursues peace.' And Jewish tradition tells us he would make great efforts to resolve arguments by befriending both of the conflicting sides and encouraging their rapprochement.

The people were in awe of Moshe, who represented a direct connection to G-d. But they loved Aharon, who represented the intimate connection and brotherly love of the Jewish people. Indeed, Moshe brought the Torah down from Heaven, which represents the eternal and irreplaceable tradition from G-d, while Aharon taught the Jews how to *live* with a Torah life of love, meaning and harmony.

Suggests Rav Soleveitchik: Moshe represented the **Rav**, or *Posek*; the Torah authority who shares an uncompromising fealty and obedience to the word of G-d and the laws and Mitzvot of the Torah.

And Aharon represented the **Rebbe** whose love for every Jew inspired a love for Judaism and Hashem and for a Jewish way of life.

When you weren't sure how to build an *Eiruv*, or whether the chicken was kosher, you asked the **Rav**. But when you needed advice on how to make peace with your business partner, you came to the **Rebbe**.

The **Rav** was able to help define clinical death within the context of medical ethics or explore the halachic solutions for *Agunot*, women whose often recalcitrant husbands refused to give them a *get* (divorce document).

The **Rebbe** would sit by the bereaved family or broken *Agunah*, and share their tears.

To be sure, Judaism needs both of these leaders, and obviously every Rav needs to be a little bit of a Rebbe, while every Rebbe needs to have enough Torah knowledge to function as a Rav when necessary. Sometimes in Jewish history personalities have succeeded in being both Rav and Rebbe. (As an example, the last Lubavitcher Rebbe, who was a towering authority of Jewish knowledge and sources, but also felt the pain of every Jew and every person; was both a Rav and a Rebbe but I do not believe it was an accident that he was known as the Rebbe ...).

We are living in an orphaned generation, and with all of our blessings including the privilege of seeing the State of Israel reborn, and the return of the Jewish people to their homeland, we do not seem to have the towering personalities we once had.

I grew up in the shadows of Rav Moshe Feinstein, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rav Yoshe Ber Soleveitchick (The Rov) Rav Aharon Kotler, among other great Torah giants.

And I was privileged to study under the tutelage of Rav Aharon Lichtenstein (who for me was the ultimate Rav) and Rav Amital (who became my Rebbe) both towering Torah giants.

And as a boy our shul Rav and my Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Shlomo Tzvi HaKohein Riskin was both Rav and Rebbe, and in my parent's home, his halachic decisions were final, and his advice was sacrosanct.

Today, in our Modern Orthodox Dati Leumi ask someone whom he or she relies on for *psak* (halachic rulings) and they will often respond: 'it depends...' Ask someone if there is anyone they truly consider their Rebbe and you will often get a blank look. And maybe that is because a real Rebbe, just like a true Rav, should be someone who like Moshe and Aharon is purely invested in the mission. For a true leader and educator, what matters is the bigger picture; what does Hashem want? Is this good for the Jewish people?

So when Hashem thinks Aharon is the man for the job, Moshe naturally understands that as well.

Fifty years ago, Yanosh Ben Gal's willingness to risk his reputation for the sake of the country and people he loved, were also the seeds of conviction that had one man in the right place, at the right time. It was probably the same reason he never really made it in politics; because what mattered to him most was never Yanosh ben Gal; which is the stuff true leaders are made. Today more than ever, we need more such leaders.

Shabbat Shalom, from Jerusalem,

Binny Freedman