

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Chukas – Balak

“AND HE [MOSHE] SAID TO THEM, ‘LISTEN, REBELLIOUS ONES...’”
(BAMIDBAR 20:10)

Why is this second verse necessary?

MOSHE WAS TAKEN TO TASK when he spoke harshly to B’nei Yisrael and said, “Listen, rebellious ones.” Aharon, the Yalkut Shimoni (Chukas 764) tells us, was not a partner in this misdeed as the *pasuk* at the end of Devarim (33:9) tells us, “And his brothers he did not recognize.” Aharon did not collaborate with his brother in the harsh statement to B’nei Yisrael. The *pasuk* clearly states that Moshe spoke these words and not Aharon. Still, the Yalkut quotes a verse in Devarim to teach us that Aharon had no part in Moshe’s words. Why is this second verse necessary if the original narrative has no implication of Aharon’s involvement whatsoever? Furthermore, even if one would be stubborn and deem it necessary to specify it nonetheless, why phrase it in terms of not “recognizing his brother?” A simple confirmation that Aharon did not speak would surely suffice! It seems that Aharon deserves praise for resisting a natural force – the drive to follow one’s brother. The normal, natural course of action would have been to join Moshe in his rebuke of the Jews. This is why it is necessary to underscore that he overcame this desire, and specifically did not follow his brother’s lead.

We can be certain that he evaluated each of his actions clearly, carefully and independently

If we step back to examine the situation, two questions, and therefore insights, come to light. Firstly, who was Aharon? Aharon was as great as Moshe himself (Bereishis Rabbah 1:15), a *tzaddik* of mind-boggling stature. We can be certain that he evaluated each of his actions clearly, carefully and independently. He evidently felt the harsh tone of Moshe’s statement was improper. If so, how could such a saintly, righteous person allow himself to be influenced by feelings of loyalty to his brother and speak inappropriately? Does Aharon deserve praise for not allowing their brotherhood to effect his decision-making process? Secondly, whatever temptation Aharon had to overcome, it should have been accomplished through sheer force of will and Aharon’s desire to do the right thing. Why, then, does the Torah describe his decision as “not recognizing his brother,” implying that Aharon temporarily disconnected his fraternal relationship in order to win this battle?

The only way to overcome this urge may be a complete separation

Apparently, the pull of loyalty to one’s brother is a powerful force, one that affects even spiritual giants of Aharon’s caliber. It can drive a person to go against his better judgement and rationalize that following a sibling’s improper actions or words is the correct course of action. The only way to overcome this urge may be a complete separation from the relationship – not even “recognizing” one’s sibling. The Yalkut Shimoni is teaching us that had Aharon not totally detached himself from the feelings of brotherhood, he could have fallen prey to their pull.

If these fraternal sensitivities are so basic, natural and profound, let us harness them in the positive direction by acknowledging our obligations to our Jewish brethren, and by acting upon them to care for the physical and spiritual needs of our brothers and sisters. We don’t need to create these feelings – they are instinctive and part of our character. As long as we don’t detach ourselves from our fellow Jews, we will naturally respond to their plight with concern and love for our brethren.