

A-365

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"THE DISCIPLES OF AARON"

Handwritten Hebrew text, likely a translation or commentary on the title "The Disciples of Aaron".

The death of Aaron, recorded in this morning's Sidra, is described in stirring and dramatic detail in the Midrash. The people mourned for ~~Jesus~~ Aaron even more than they later did for Moses, for Aaron was a man who loved peace and pursued peace. It was as an aternal tribute to the first High Priest of Israel that Hillel bade us regard ourselves as the disciples of Aaron by emulating his noble qualities. They are four in number, and deserve to be spelled out clearly for all of us who se earnestly desire the ideals Aaron cherished.

Ohez shalom. To the man who is ambitious and opportunistic, peace is only a truce, a poor second-best to total victory for his own ruthless pursuits. In order to be a disciple of Aaron, you must not seek peace merely for its utilitarian value, not merely because it is the best arrangement under the conditions that prevail, but because you love peace, because peace is the normal, most desirable state of the world. One of G-d's names is: Shalom. Shalom is a positive virtue in its own right, not merely the absence of strife. Hence, one must not only hate war but love peace. Peace is the kind of harmony that leads to perfection; Shalom leads to sheel shalom.

Rodef shalom. To pursue peace means not to be satisfied with finding it, but actively to engage in seeking it out, in creating it where it is lacking. Aaron was a pursuer of peace. The Rabbis tell of Aaron going first to one antagonist and then to the other and telling each how the other regrets the state of enmity and wishes that bygones would be bygones. As a result of his active efforts, peace would reign.

There is yet another explanation of this felicitous phrase given by a Hasidic teacher. Peace, he says, is a virtue only when it unites decent people with each other. But peace amongst people of evil design can only lead to greater harm to the world. Therefore one must "pursue" peace, in the sense of chasing it away, when it concerns corrupt and malicious people. If we fail to "pursue" peace in this sense, then the Arab League might prove a more serious threat to Israel, the Chinese and Russians too powerful for the survival of democracy, and the gangsters of the country more influential than the forces of righteousness.

Ohev et ha-beriyot. The love of fellow man can come from many sources. I may love my fellow human because he is human. In a deeper sense, that means I love another man because I love myself, I see myself in him. There is nothing wrong with that kind of humanistic approach. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" implies we must first love ourselves. But there is always the danger that one does not really love himself. There is the danger that this kind of love exists only where I feel a kinship of some kind between myself and the other man. But where there are pronounced differences in color or belief or background or opinion, this kind of love breaks down. Hence, Hillel tells us, we must be disciples of Aaron who loved et ha-beriyot -- creatures. He loved men ~~because~~ because they were created by G-d. In loving man he loved G-d, for the love of created and Creator were intimately bound up with each other in his eyes. And when we love a man because he is G-d's creature, then no differences between us can affect that love adversely. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, I am the Lord."

Umekarvan le'Torah. The love of fellow creature may be expressed in many ways. Charity, respect, consideration, economic assistance, appreciation -- all are signs of such love. But greatest of all is helping your fellow creature find meaning in life, assist him to appreciate why he is alive and how to spend his life in a manner that is worthy and dignified. The highest form of ohav et ha-beriyot is therefore mekarvan le'Torah. The "Netziv" of Volozhin used to say that this Mishnah urges us to love ~~precisely in~~

not only those who are devout and scholars, benei Torah, but -- perhaps especially -- those who are distant from Torah. For the Tanna leads with us to love people and bring them close to Torah -- which means that they originally were distant from Torah, and only through our love were brought close!

N.L.

*This sermon was especially
for Maamad. Not preached yet.*