



SHEMINI

STEPS OF TRUTH

What's True Today Is True Today

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Shemini

On the eighth day, following the seven days of their inauguration, Aaron and his sons begin to officiate as *Kohanim* (priests): a fire issues forth from G-d to consume the offerings on the altar, and the Divine Presence comes to dwell in the Sanctuary.

Aaron's two elder sons, Nadab and Abihu, offer a "strange fire before

G-d, which He commanded them not," and they die before G-d. Aaron is silent in the face of his tragedy. Moses and Aaron subsequently disagree as to a point of law regarding the offerings, but Moses concedes to Aaron that Aaron is in the right.

G-d commands the kosher laws, identifying the animal species

permissible and forbidden for consumption. Land animals may be eaten only if they have split hooves and also chew their cud; fish must have fins and scales; a list of nonkosher birds is given; and a list of kosher insects (four types of locusts) is given.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

Does being authentically righteous mean that I (at least try to) do everything right, or can authenticity be compartmentalized? Can I be authentically righteous when praying to G-d in the morning despite knowing that I will cheat my clients in the afternoon?



RASHI RULE

Rashi only comments to resolve a basic difficulty in the biblical text. We likely missed the difficulty if the text seems self-explanatory and Rashi comments anyway.

TEXT 1A

Leviticus 10:1-2

א. וַיִּקְחוּ בְנֵי אֶהֱרֹן נָדָב וַאֲבִיהוּא אֵשׁ מִחֹתָתוֹ וַיִּתְּנוּ בָהֶן אֵשׁ
וַיִּשְׂימוּ עָלֶיהָ קִטְרֶת, וַיִּקְרְבוּ לִפְנֵי ה' אֵשׁ זָרָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוָּה אֹתָם.
ב. וַתֵּצֵא אֵשׁ מִלִּפְנֵי ה' וַתֹּאכַל אוֹתָם, וַיָּמָתוּ לִפְנֵי ה'.

1. Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, each took his pan, put fire in it, and placed incense upon the flame. Thus, they offered fire that was foreign [to G-d because] He had not commanded them to bring it.
2. And a fire emerged from before G-d and consumed them. And they died before G-d.



JEWISH MOURNING—*ONENUS*

During *onenus*, mourners are exempt from rituals and practices that demand focus and mindfulness. This includes offering sacrifices to G-d.

EXCEPTION:

G-d ordained that Aaron and his surviving sons partake in the festive offerings despite the tragedy.

TEXT 1B

Ibid., 10:13

וְאִכְלֶתֶם אֹתָהּ בְּמָקוֹם קֹדֶשׁ, כִּי חֶקֶךָ וְחֶק
בְּנֶיךָ הִיא מֵאֲשֵׁי ה', כִּי כֵן צִוִּיתִי.

Eat [the offerings] in a holy place because it is
your portion and your sons' portion from the
G-dly flames [on the altar], for so I was
commanded.

Aaron and his sons burned
the *Rosh Chodesh* offering
instead of eating it.



TEXT 2A

Ibid., 10:16–18

טז. וְאֵת שְׁעִיר הַחֲטָאת דָּרַשׁ דָּרַשׁ מֹשֶׁה וְהִנֵּה שָׂרָף, וַיִּקְצֹף עַל אֶלְעָזָר
וְעַל אִיתָמָר בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן הַנוֹתָרִם לֵאמֹר.

יז. מִדּוּעַ לֹא אָכַלְתֶּם אֶת הַחֲטָאת בְּמָקוֹם הַקֹּדֶשׁ?
יח. . . . אָכֹל תֹּאכְלוּ אֹתָהּ בַּקֹּדֶשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר צֻוֵּיתִי.

16. Moses thoroughly investigated [what had happened to] the he-goat sin offering and discovered that it had been burned. He was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's surviving sons, saying:

17. "Why did you not eat the sin offering in the sacred place?

18. ". . . You should have eaten it in a holy place as I instructed."

TEXT 2B

Ibid., 10:19

וַיְדַבֵּר אֶהֱרֹן אֶל מֹשֶׁה, הֲיֵן הַיּוֹם הִקְרִיבוּ אֶת חַטָּאתָם
וְאֶת עֹלָתָם לִפְנֵי ה' וַתִּקְרָאנָה אֹתִי כְּאֵלֶּה, וְאָכַלְתִּי
חַטָּאת הַיּוֹם, הֲיֵיטֵב בְּעֵינַי ה'?

And Aaron spoke to Moses: "But today, did [my sons] offer up their sin and burnt offerings before G-d? [They did not; I did.] Would G-d be pleased with me if I ate a sin offering today despite these tragic events that befell me?"

TEXT 2C

Ibid., 10:20

וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה, וַיֵּטֵב בְּעֵינָיו.

Moses heard [this], and it pleased him.

AARON'S DEFENSE

“We were instructed to partake in the inaugural offerings, not *all* offerings. The *Rosh Chodesh* offering was not brought in honor of the inauguration.”



MOSES' RESPONSE

Moses was pleased with this answer.



QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

Can you spot a difficulty in the words
"Moses heard, and it pleased him"?

If you can't find a difficulty in these
words, place them in the story's
context and see if you can spot it.



QUESTION

The five-year-old assumes that if Aaron was speaking to Moses, Moses was obviously listening. So, why does the Torah specifically mention that Moses was listening?


TEXT 3

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Sichot
Kodesh 5729:2, p. 101*

כבוד קדושת מורי וחמי אדוננו מורינו ורבינו פלעגט זאגן אז ס'איז פאראן
הערן און דערהערן. און אזוי געפינט מען דאך בכמה פסוקים וואו מיטן
לשון שמיעה מיינט מען ניט סתם הערן נאר דערהערן, מקבל זיין. אזוי ווי
"דבר כי שומע עבדך" (שמואל א ג, ט), אדער "נעשה ונשמע" (שמות
כד, ז) ועוד. וואס עס מיינט ניט סתם הערן, נאר מקבל זיין.

My honorable, saintly father-in-law, the Rebbe, would say that there is hearing and there is internalizing. Many passages use the term "listening" not to say that one heard but that one internalized and accepted. For example, "Speak, for your servant is listening" (I Samuel 3:9) or "We will do, and we will listen" (Exodus 24:7). There are many other examples. These do not refer to mere listening but to accepting.

ANSWER

- Hear →  →
- Listen →  ✓

Moses listened and accepted Aaron's argument.
But what was he pleased with?

TEXT 4A

Rashi, Leviticus 10:20

THE RASHI

"וַיִּיטֵב בְּעֵינָיו." הוֹדָה, וְלֹא בּוֹשׁ לֹמַר
לֹא שָׁמַעְתִּי.

"And it pleased him." He acknowledged
[the answer] and was not ashamed to say,
"I did not hear."

QUESTION ON RASHI

How can the translation of these words suggest that Moses was simply unashamed to acknowledge Aaron was right, when the phrase “he was pleased” implies that Moses genuinely liked Aaron’s insight?

ANSWER ON RASHI

Moses was not just willing to admit defeat. He was so enthralled, so pleased by what Aaron said, that he told everyone.

TEXT 4B

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Sichot
Kodesh 5729:2, p. 101*

אויף דעם זאגט רש"י: "הודה ולא בוש לומר לא שמעתי", אז משה
האט משבח געווען די סברא און געהאלטן אין איין זאגן. ווי רש"י
איז מדייק "לומר — לא שמעתי", אז ער האט עס ניט געהערט און
אים איז גאר ניט איינגעפאלן אזא סברא.

Rashi says, "He acknowledged and was not ashamed to say, 'I did not hear.'" This means that Moses lauded Aaron's argument and repeated it continually. Rashi is careful to say [he was not ashamed] "to say, 'I didn't hear.'" [He told everyone that] he never heard this remarkable theory. It had never occurred to him.

TEXT 5A

*Talmud, Zevachim
101b*

"וייטב בעיניו". לא בוש משה לומר לא
שמעתי אלא שמעתי ושכחתי.

"And it pleased him." Moses did not claim
he had never heard this. He was not
ashamed to say, "I heard it and forgot."

TEXT 5B

*Rabbi David Halevi
Segal, Divrei David, ad
loc.*

שיותר כבוד היה לו למשה לומר לא שמעתי כלל ממה
שיאמר שמעתי ושכחתי. שמאמר לא שמעתי הוא מעלה
בתלמיד חכם, כדאיתא באבות (ה, ז): "ועל מה שלא שמע
אומר לא שמעתי".

It would have been more dignified for Moses to say "I never heard it" than to say "I heard it and forgot." This is because admitting to not knowing is commendable for Torah scholars. As our sages wrote, "When a wise person doesn't know, they say, 'I don't know'" (Ethics of the Fathers 5:7).

ANOTHER EXPLANATION

Moses admitted the truth instead of saving face, showing humility. Rashi rejected this version because it could imply Moses had authority over G-d's rulings or that Divine rulings required his endorsement.



What made Aaron's
teaching so exciting
and inspiring to Moses?

TEXT 6

Psalms 85:11

חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת נִפְגְּשׁוּ, צֶדֶק וְשָׁלוֹם נִשְׁקוּ.

Kindness and truth have met; righteousness
and peace have kissed.

MOSES, MAN OF TRUTH

Moses stood before G-d at Mount Sinai and knew that everything must be done according to G-d's will. He demanded unwavering devotion to G-d from everyone.



TEXT 7A

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman
of Liadi, Likutei Torah,
Bamidbar, pp. 2b–3a*

משה שושבינא דמלכא.

פירוש, כמו שעל דרך משל שושבינו
של החתן שמוליך את החתן למקום
הכלה, כך משה רבינו עליו השלום
הוא הממשיך בחינת יחוד אור אין
סוף ברוך הוא למטה שיהא שורה
ומתגלה בנפש האדם . . . דהיינו
לידע את ה' שהוא חיי החיים . . .

ובחינת דעת אינה הידיעה לבדה, אלא
דעת מלשון הרגשה שהוא ההרגשה
בלב, שיכיר וירגיש כאילו רואה
לעיני בשר בראיה חושית ממש.

Moses is the companion of the king.

Just as the groom's companion
ushers the groom to the bride, so
did Moses usher the state of Divine
Oneness into this world so that it
could be palpable in every soul . . .
and all would know that G-d is the
source of life. . . .

Knowledge does not just mean to
know; it means to sense it palpably
in the heart: to recognize G-d, to feel
as if we are gazing upon G-d and
seeing Him with our physical eyes.



AARON, MAN OF THE PEOPLE

Aaron inspired everyone to embrace G-d on their level and grow at their own pace.

TEXT 7B

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman
of Liadi, ibid., p. 3a*

ואהרן שושבינא דמטרוניתא.

פירוש, מטרוניתא היא בחינת כנסת ישראל, מקור
נשמות ישראל, ולקשרם בה' ולדבקה בו.

Aaron is the companion of the bride.

In this context, the bride is a euphemism for the Jewish people—the collective Jewish soul—to bind them to G-d so they can become attached.

MOSES, MAN OF TRUTH



- Absolute devotion to G-d.
- Held everyone to the same high standard.
- Urged others to overcome their weaknesses head-on.

AARON, MAN OF THE PEOPLE



- Guided steady spiritual growth.
- Practiced kindness and understanding.
- Nurtured individuals through their weaknesses.

TEXT 8

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 17, p. 113*

פון די אונטערשיידן צווישן אמת און חסד:

דער ענין פון אמת איז אז עס זיינען אין אים
ניטא קיין שינויים. אין יעדן זמן און אין יעדען
מקום שטייט ער בשווה, אין דער זעלבער
מדריגה און אין דעם זעלבן מעמד ומצב.

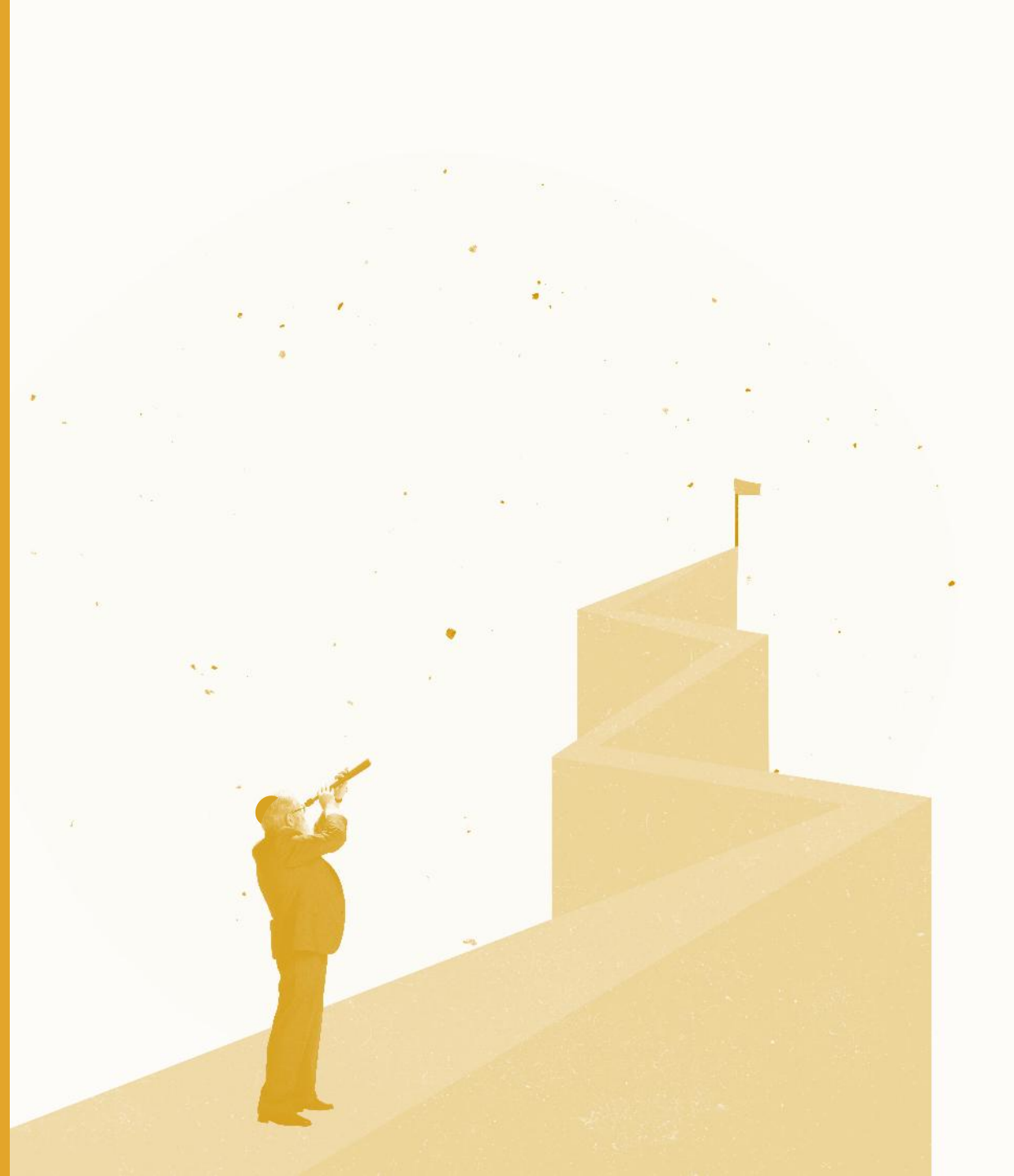
חסד אבער, וואס ענינו איז מאכן גוט צו
אנדערע מוז מען דאך זיך רעכנען מיט דעם
צושטאנד און דרכים פון יעדערן פון די
באזונדערע מקבלים וואס אינם שווים זה
לזה. נאכמער, בא יעדער עשיית חסד צו א
צווייטן איז דא א שינוי וחילוק אין דער
השפעה ווי זי איז באם משפיע און ווי זי
ווערט נמשך צו א צווייטן.

Among the distinctions
between truth and kindness:

Truth is unchanging. It is
always the same regardless
of time, place, and
circumstance.

Kindness, however, is about
helping others. This requires
careful consideration of each
recipient's circumstances
and dispositions. They are
not all alike. Moreover, the
kindness a giver might want
to bestow might not be
kindness to the recipient.

Aaron led all people to the same destination, but each began at their own point.



TEXT 9

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, ibid., pp.
113–114*

איז נטית סברת משה, מדת האמת, אז
בכל ענין וואס עס איז דא א ספק,
פסק'נען אז עס איז ניטא קיין שינוי פון
אין זמן און מעמד ומצב ביז א צווייטן.
דעריבער בנידון דידן, האט ער געהאלטן
אז ס'איז ניטא קיין חילוק פון קדשי
דורות און קדשי שעה: די זעלבע קדושה
וואס איז דא "בשעה" (זו), אין דעם
זעלבן אופן דארף זיין די קדושה
ל"דורות".

מצד בחינת חסד אבער, מדריגת אהרן,
וואס זיין ענין איז געווען "אוהב שלום
ורודף שלום אוהב את הבריות ומקרבן
לתורה" (אבות א, יב).

Moses, the man of truth, was
predisposed to thinking that all time
frames and circumstances must be
treated equally in cases of doubt.
Therefore, in our case, he saw no
difference between the temporary
inaugural and the permanent regular
offerings. The sacred aura the people
experienced on that holy day should
be all-prevalent.

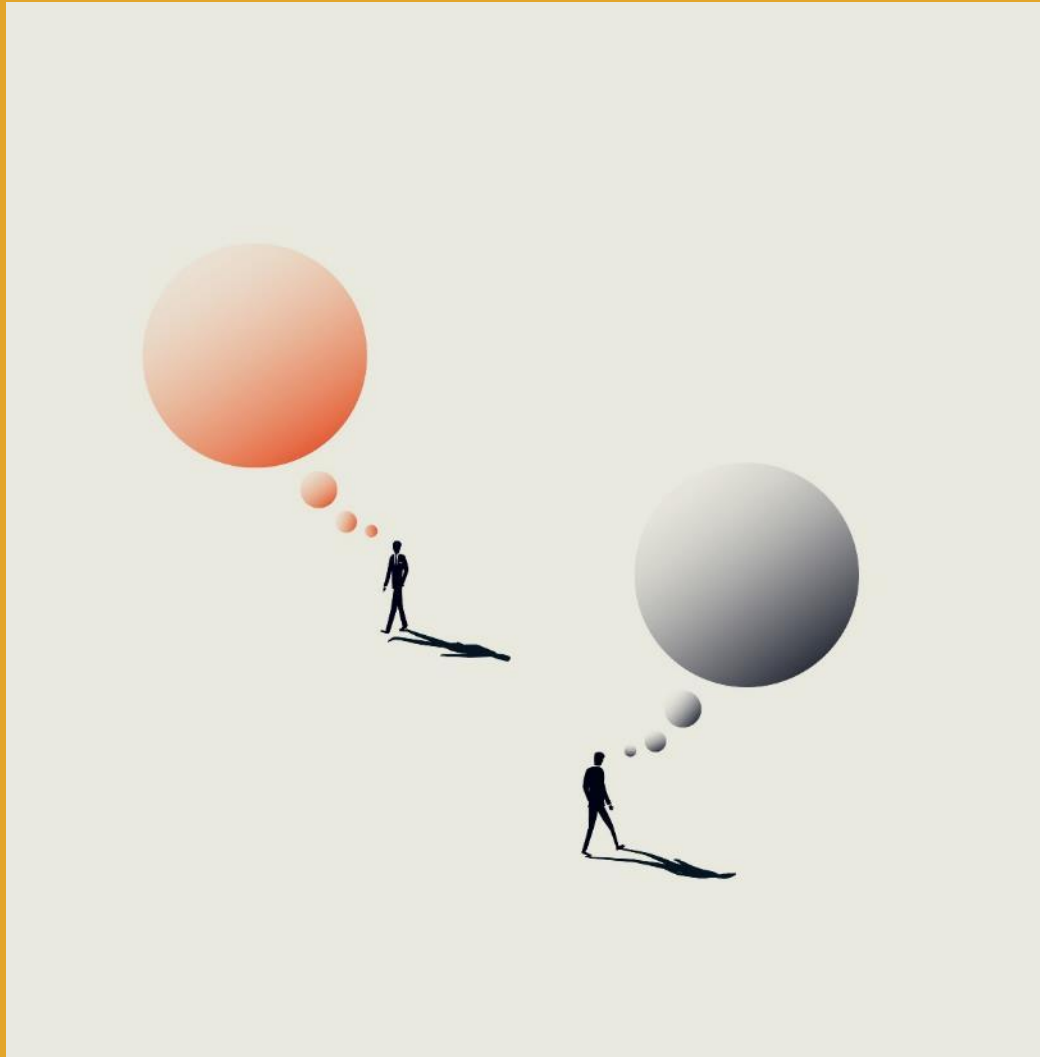
Aaron, however, was a man of
kindness. He was characterized as "a
lover of peace and a pursuer of
peace, one who loves G-d's creations
and draws them close to the Torah"
(Ethics of the Fathers 1:12).

TEXT 9

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, ibid., pp.
113–114*

ער האט זיך איבערגעגעבן צו אידן
ביז צו אזעלכע וואס זיינען אין סוג
פון "בריות" און זיי משפיע געווען
יעדן לויט זיין דרגא ומצב. דערפאר
האט ער געזען אז ס'איז דא א חילוק
צווישן "קדשי שעה" און "קדשי
דורות": מצד המקבלים, די וואס
דארפן אנקומען צום (חסד, צום)
קרוב וקדשים קען מען ניט מאנען
אז די קדושה זאל זיין אין דעם
זעלבן אופן ותוקף אין אלע שינויי
דרגות און זמנים.

He was devoted to all Jews, including
Jews whose only redeeming quality was
that they were G-d's creations. He helped
each according to their requirements.
Accordingly, Aaron was trained to see
subtle differences. He saw a distinction
between the temporary inaugural and
permanent regular offerings. We can't
expect the recipients—those who need
our kindness, those who need to be
drawn close to G-d through the sacred
offerings—always to maintain the same
intense passion for holiness that they
enjoyed on that day.



Moses believed the inaugural holiness should extend to all offerings, while Aaron recognized that inspiration varies, allowing for different rules for the two sets of offerings.

TEXT 10

*Midrash, Shemot
Rabah 5:10*

חֶסֶד זֶה אֱהֲרֹן . . . וְאֵמֶת זֶה מֹשֶׁה.

. . . הָיוּ "חֶסֶד וְאֵמֶת נִפְגְּשׁוּ" (תְּהִלִּים פה, יא), כְּמָה
דְּתִימָא: "וַיִּלָּךְ וַיִּפְגְּשׁוּהוּ בְּהַר הָאֱלֹקִים" (שְׁמוֹת ד, כז)

Aaron is kindness . . . and Moses is truth.

. . . "Kindness and truth have met" (Psalms 85:11),
as the passage states, "And [Aaron] went and met
[Moses] on G-d's mountain" (Exodus 4:27).

Moses learned from Aaron that while there is one objective truth, each person's sincere efforts reflect a genuine part of that truth.



TEXT 11

*Rabbi Adin Even-
Israel Steinsaltz,
Tanya Ha'mevu'ar,
Chapter 13*

כל הויה שבמציאות יש בה משהו של אמת, יש בה את נקודת האמת שלה. ולכן מדת האמת היא קו הנמשך מלמעלה לאין סוף ולמטה לאין תכלית, מן הקצה אל הקצה, בתוך כל הדברים ובפנימיותם. אין קץ להגדרת הדבר שיכול להיות אמת, מן הקצה העליונה של המציאות עד למדרגה התחתונה ביותר. בכל דבר יש נקודה של אמת, תהא אשר תהא.

Everything that exists has some truth, and this point of truth is its essence. Truth is like a chain that reaches from the highest heights to the lowest lows, from the top to the bottom. It permeates and is the inner dimension of each level along the spectrum. There is no limit to the types of things that can be true. From the highest point in existence to the lowest, each point, whatever it might be, has a point of truth.



Moses was so excited about Aaron's perspective because it was a groundbreaking and transformative idea for him.

Our goal is to keep all of
G-d's laws, yet each
individual *mitzvah* we do
is genuine and forges a
real connection with G-d.



KEY POINTS

1. Aaron's two sons passed away suddenly amid the Tabernacle inauguration festivities.
2. G-d told Moses that Aaron's remaining family's grief must not disturb the festivities. Despite their bereavement, Aaron and his remaining sons would partake of the offerings of the inaugural day.
3. Moses thought this pertained to all the offerings. Aaron helped him see that it pertained only to the inaugural offerings, not the ordinary offerings of that day.

KEY POINTS

4. As a man of truth, Moses was uncompromising: he expected one standard from all. Accordingly, he thought there should be one standard for all offerings. Aaron, a man of kindness, saw each person's unique needs and strengths. This primed him to see the different offerings in different lights.
5. Moses appreciated this insight and shared it widely. Until then, he thought our relationship with G-d is only authentic if we observe all of G-d's laws. Aaron taught him that each observance is authentic. Though life is a journey of growth, each step of the journey is real.

