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Angel For Shabbat, Parashat Tetsaveh

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

Commentators have noted the unusual fact that the name of Moses does not appear in Parashat Tetsaveh. This is in sharp contrast with his brother Aaron whose name recurs frequently in this Torah portion. Since this Parasha focuses on the garments to be made for and worn by Aaron as he assumes his role as High Priest, it is reasonable to suggest that the Torah wished to highlight Aaron and draw attention away from Moses.

Some have suggested that Moses himself wished to keep his name out of this section in order to pay full homage to his brother. In his humility and genuine love for his brother, Moses chose to cede the stage entirely to Aaron. This example of brotherly love harks back to an earlier story in the book of Shemot.

When the Almighty first called on Moses to go to Egypt to lead the Israelites, Moses demurred. He was a humble shepherd who did not feel worthy of the enormous responsibility of leadership. Moreover, Moses may have thought that his older brother Aaron had a better claim to lead the people than he did. Aaron, after all, lived among the Israelites and knew their situation first hand. Moses had been living for many years in Midian. How would Aaron react when he learned that God chose Moses rather than him? God reassures Moses that Aaron would see Moses "and rejoice in his heart." Aaron was such a fine human being that he fully rejoiced in Moses's success. He was not envious, not insulted, not feeling bad for being passed over.

Just as Aaron's love for Moses was selfless, so Moses's love for Aaron was also selfless. Each of them willingly and full heartedly rejoiced in the success and honor of the other. They didn't let their egos get in the way.

Genuine love is a special gift. It requires the ability to identify fully with the beloved. The Hebrew word for love, ahavah, derives from the root meaning "to give." A loving person is a giving person. Imperfect "love" is when one is really interested in one's own pleasure and advantage, when one is more interested in taking than in giving.

In order to love selflessly, one must have inner confidence. One with a weak sense of self has trouble loving because his/her ego intrudes. Interest in bolstering one's own ego detracts from the ability of sharing love fully with another.

It is very difficult to give a full and generous compliment. People want to protect their own egos. When they compliment others, they feel a threat to their own frail sense of self. The compliment and [inner thoughts] go like this: you've done well [but I can do better]; you've achieved something great [but not as great as what I have achieved]; you are loveable [but not as loveable as I am]; you are

beautiful, smart, successful [but you have many shortcomings too.]

People with weak egos constantly seek validation and recognition. They want their pictures and names in the newspapers. They make outrageous statements, or dress outrageously, or do outrageous things so that they will be noticed. They don't want to share the limelight because they fear that they will be eclipsed by others.

Moses and Aaron set examples of selfless love. They genuinely rejoiced in each other's success. Their egos and self-interest did not factor into their mutual respect and commitment.

In demonstrating their respect and love for each other, they thereby demonstrated their own greatness of spirit. They set a model worthy of emulation.