

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Aharon did so” (Bamidbar 8:3). “[The Torah says this] in order to tell us how praiseworthy Aharon was, that he did not deviate” (Rashi, based on the Sifray). Much has been written attempting to explain why “not deviating” is so praiseworthy, and why anyone would have thought that Aharon might have done anything other than exactly what had been commanded.

The Sifsay Chachamim pretty much dismisses the question, telling us that even though there is no doubt that Aharon followed G-d's commandment exactly, having the Torah testify that he did is a testament to his righteousness. The Devek Tov (General Principle of Rashi #13) posits that it is the norm for the Torah to say a commandment was followed in situations where every detail, even those not absolutely necessary, was fulfilled. Although he does not specify which details are referred to in our verse, others suggest particular facets that the verse is alluding to. The Moshav Zekainim, going along similar lines as the way the Maharshal understands the Ramban, says that even though one of Aharon's sons could have lit the Menorah, Aharon chose to do so himself. However, the Toldos Adam points out that this first lighting occurred on Rosh Chodesh Nisan, the same day that Nadav and Avihu had died, creating a situation where only the Kohain Gadol could perform the service. (According to the Toldos Adam, the verse is telling us that Aharon realized that only he could light the Menorah.) The Maharshal himself suggests that the plural “lights” (“nairim”) implied that only two had to be lit, but Aharon still lit all seven. Another “hidur” I saw mentioned (although I forget where) was the exact placement of the wicks. All of the lights had to face the center light; Aharon set them up and lit them in a way that they were at the precise angle facing the center light, not just pointing in the right direction.

The Panim Yafos suggests that Aharon didn't just light them facing the right way, but made sure the wicks were facing the right way from the time they were set up. He then lit them one from the other starting with the center one, bending the wick to touch the already lit fire that was next to it. This system made sure that each wick had to be facing center. Add to this the fact that the Menorah had become ritually impure upon the death of

Nadav and Avihu and therefore couldn't be touched (lest Aharon himself became ritually impure) - which made setting up and lighting all the more difficult - and we can understand why Aharon is being praised for ensuring that there was no deviation even under such circumstances. (The Panim Yafos is operating under the assumption that the Menorah became ritually impure when Nadav and Avihu died; see Ambuha d'Sifray, who discusses whether this was really the case.)

The most famous answer is probably that of the Maskil Le'David (Rabbi Dovid Pardo), who suggests that Aharon is being praised for using the prescribed stepstool to set up and light the Menorah despite his being so tall that he didn't need it. In Sifray De'bay Rav, Rabbi Pardo adds another element; Aharon used the same amount of oil in each of the seven lights because he was commanded to put in enough oil to last “from evening to morning,” even though the commandment also included the provision that one light (the western one) always remain lit. Rather than adding more oil to this light so that it could last longer, he followed the simple wording of the commandment and trusted that G-d would miraculously make it burn longer.

The Be'er Basadeh says that since the Menorah was lit from evening to morning, Aharon had lit it the night before, even before he was commanded to. The Torah therefore tells us that Aharon hadn't deviated from correct procedure even though he did it before the procedure was taught to him. (The Maira Dachya has a similar approach).

Rashi had told us (8:2) that the lighting of the Menorah immediately follows the offerings of the 12 Nesi'im (Heads of Tribe) because Aharon had felt left out that he, who was the head of the Tribe of Levi, was not part of it. G-d therefore told him that his share is greater than theirs, because he gets to light the Menorah. The Nesi'im had all wanted to bring their offerings, the first ones brought in the newly dedicated Mishkan (see Rashi on 7:3), on the very first day (7:10), but G-d had told them that they should bring their offerings on 12 separate days instead (7:11). It was on the day that they wanted to bring it, and that the first Nasi brought his, when Aharon first lit the Menorah. Obviously, it wasn't after they had each brought theirs that Aharon felt left out, but before they had brought them, when he realized he wasn't a part of it.

According to the Ramban (Shemos 40:27; see Netziv on 40:23, who disagrees), Moshe had lit the

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NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL AND THE
WORLD WIDE WEB AT [HTTP://AISHDAS.ORG](http://AISHDAS.ORG).
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Menorah during the seven days of the "milu'im," which preceded the first day of the fully operational Mishkan. Therefore, when Aharon lit the Menorah on the "eighth" day, he wasn't the first to light it; he was taking over for Moshe, who had done it for a week. Some consolation! The Nesi'im get to bring the first offerings in the new Mishkan, but Aharon gets to take over something Moshe had already done. There were guidelines within which Aharon had to operate when lighting the Menorah, but couldn't he find a way to improve upon what Moshe had done for a week (while staying within the guidelines)? Wasn't there a way to make the lighting of the Menorah his own, so that he could be the innovator the way the Nesi'im were innovators? "And Aharon did so, just as had been commanded to Moshe." He didn't change a thing. He didn't try to improve anything, didn't try to come up with an angle to make it "his" lighting. If this was the way Moshe did it, this was the way Aharon was going to do it. It wasn't about Aharon, it was about fulfilling G-d's will. And there's no greater praise than that. © 2009 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

It is a terrible personality trait to be a complainer. It is hard to live with complainers at home, in the work place and in the community. In this week's parsha we are made aware of the dismal consequences of complaining. Rashi points out that the complainers in the desert had no real basis for that complaint. They were just dissatisfied somehow and so they complained against Moshe and eventually against G-d.

Moshe in his final oration to the Jewish people in the book of Dvarim will himself complain about the people of Israel that they are unnecessarily quarrelsome and a bunch of complainers. There is a Jewish joke, more ironic than funny, about three Jewish matrons eating lunch at a restaurant in New York and the waiter approached them in the middle of their meal and asked them "Is anything alright?"

Rashi's interpretation of the lack of justification for complaints in the desert portrays for us a very serious character defect within the Jewish people. They are chronic complainers and a vast majority of the time their complaints are really baseless. The many

complaints in the desert follow the usual pattern - food, Moshe's leadership, the unfairness of life and the difficulty of living up to the role of being the chosen people.

All through First Temple times we find that the prophets of Israel were barraged with complaints about their mission and words. The prophets were the solution to Israel's troubles. The people complained that they were the problem. And so destruction and exile came in the wake of the unjustified complaints.

I am not a mental health professional by any stretch of imagination. Yet my instinct tells me that chronic complainers are really not happy with themselves and project that dissatisfaction outwards on events and humans that are not the cause of their original dissatisfaction. There is something deep within us that requires self-justification and self-empowerment.

When that need is fulfilled we are on the whole happy, contented and optimistic. When that ingredient in our soul and psyche is absent we are complainers, carpers, sad and sometimes destructive people. We recite in our daily morning prayers the statement as to how fortunate we are to be the special people that G-d has chosen to lead the world in service to Him. We may all recite that prayer but how many of us are really convinced in our heart of hearts of its truth?

The rabbis of the Talmud harshly disdained the chronic complainer - "Is it not sufficient for you that you are alive?" Nothing is perfect in life but that is not a justification for complaints. We are bidden to deal with problems to the extent that we can and not to dwell on them overly and constantly complain about them. We have to seek an inner peace that will allow us an optimistic attitude and an avoidance of complaints. Our parents, schools and society should somehow concentrate on achieving this goal with our coming generations. © 2009 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira, Rosh Yeshivat Ramat Gan; Translated by Moshe Goldberg

When Moshe is exposed to the phenomenon of the great desire for meat by the nation, two startling changes take place in his behavior. First, Moshe becomes weak. Instead of the familiar decisive reaction that we have seen on other more serious occasions (such as the Golden Calf, when he fought valiantly for Yisrael and was even ready to pay the heavy personal price of "erase me from Your book" [Shemot 32:32]), in this case he reacts by saying, "Why have I not found favor in Your eyes, in that You have placed the burden of this entire nation on me? Did I conceive this entire nation, did I give birth to it?"

[Bamidbar 11:11-12]. At the end of his words, he reaches the opposite conclusion from in the past: "If this is what You do to me, kill me, so that I will not see the evil that happens to me" [11:15].

Second, the authority of the leadership changes character. After the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe climbs up the mountain and descends a second and a third time, prays and lectures, calms the Divine anger and repairs lost trust between Yisrael and their Father in Heaven. It is clear for all to see that Moshe acts in the role of the undisputed leader and an intermediary to G-d. But now, G-d tells Moshe, "Gather together for Me seventy men from among the elders of Yisrael, and let them stand together with you. And I will set aside some of the spirit on you, and place it on them." [11:16-17]. The Almighty not only agrees with the fact that Moshe is weaker, He even helps to extend the effect.

This leaves us in need of an explanation. Here is Moshe, who was a fountain of strength when the nation developed such a serious fault at the very exalted moment of receiving the Torah-he did not feel any weakness at that moment and did not ask to be replaced. Why should he despair in the face of what seems to be an "innocent" desire, to eat meat?

The answer is that the difference is not related to the character of the sin but rather to the way it was performed. In spite of its serious character, the sin of the Golden Calf was based on an expression of a yearning for the Divine: "Tomorrow is a holiday for G-d" [Shemot 32:5]. This was the motive that caused all the people to give up their gold, in order to recover their closeness to G-d, which they felt that they had lost, because of "this man Moshe" [32:1], about whom they felt, "we do not know what happened to him" [ibid]. But in asking for meat the nation does not look towards the heaven but rather towards the earth. The people are moved by nothing more than a desire to chew flesh with their teeth. In the face of such a lowly desire Moshe-the man of G-d-is rendered speechless.

Moshe is ready to lead the nation and to protect it from harm, but he does not feel that he has the skill to carry the nation in his bosom "like the nursemaid carries a suckling child" [Bamidbar 11:12], to be the one to care for the nation's physical desires. And that is why the time has come for the elders of the nation to participate in the leadership. They do not gnaw away at Moshe's strength but rather expand it. The exalted spirit of the elders is the same as that of Moshe, but they are able to approach areas from which Moshe must stay away. This helps them to assume their proper true position.

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

When we open the Ark and take the Torah out, everyone recites a verse from this week's Torah portion: "And it was when the Ark traveled,

Moshe said, 'Arise Almighty and disperse Your enemies, and those who hate You will flee from You.' "

Why is this verse recited then?

Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, a Torah illuminary, who lived in the Old City of Jerusalem until 1932, answered this question at the dedication of a Yeshiva. "Whenever someone wants to start some worthwhile Torah institution or project, there are always people who will try to stop him. Therefore, when we take out the Torah we ask that the Almighty should disperse the enemies of torah and prevent them from causing trouble."

Torah is the lifeblood of the Jewish people. Our enemies knew that if they could keep the Jewish people from learning Torah, the Jewish people could be swayed and conquered. Therefore, for the Jewish people to be strong and to continue, we must give our support for every effort to teach and spread Torah. Any Jewish leader who does not throw his support behind efforts to teach Torah and expand Torah schools for our children, sorely lacks the fundamental principle crucial to our survival! *based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2009 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“Make for you two trumpets of silver; of hammered work shall you make them, and they shall be unto you for the summoning of the congregations and for causing the camps to set forward" (Numbers 10:2).

Beha'alotcha, our biblical portion this week, uses two words (mahanot and eda) to describe the gathering of Israelites and two words (t'rua and t'kiya) to describe the sounds their trumpets are to make: the trumpets shall summon the 'camps' (mahanot) as well as the 'community' (eda, literally the 'witness congregation') of Israel; in time of war they shall sound the broken, weeping t'rua, whereas in times of festival they shall sound the firm, exultant t'kiya.

My revered teacher Rav J.B. Soloveitchik defined each form of assemblage: the encampment of Israel involved herding together as a form of protection against enemies and difficult conditions, (mahaneh is biblically used for protective army encampment, as in Genesis 32:8,9); the eda or witness community of Israel suggests a united purpose, a mission to the world. Similarly my rebbe distinguished between the t'rua, which signals fear, and the t'kiya a firm, exultant sound reflecting victory.

These different terms - and realities of national existence - hark back to two covenants which formed us: The Covenant between the Pieces and The Covenant at Sinai.

The Covenant between the Pieces (Genesis 15) established Israel's nationhood. It guarantees Abraham progeny and delineates the boundaries of the

homeland his descendants would inherit. It takes place after a war that Abraham fights, contains an element of great fear (15:12), and foretells a period of affliction in a foreign land. But at the same time it guarantees eternal survival and eventual occupation of the Promised Land. This is what Rav Soloveitchik calls the covenant of fate. After all, an individual neither chooses the family or nation-state into which he/she is born nor the persecution he/she may be singled out to suffer. But within the dimensions of such realities, familial solidarity and the haven of secure boundaries will always enable us to survive despite the challenges and obstacles.

The Covenant at Sinai (Exodus 19, 20) went one step further, turning our fate into destiny and inspiring - even imbuing - our nation with a national purpose, a Divinely rooted system of universal morality and ethics. To this end we were given 613 commandments, enabling us to become a holy nation and a teacher of morality and peace. This second covenant was not inflicted on us; indeed, it's only after we volunteered to internalize the laws that the Almighty agreed to enter into such a relationship (Exodus 24:7, 8).

The first covenant was our covenant of fate, the formation of the encampment of Jacob, the fearful, trembling sounds of the t'rua which encourages us to seek refuge in the solidarity of a family/nation/state united against inimical forces. The second covenant was our covenant of destiny, the recruitment of Israel as G-d's witnesses, the exultant t'kiya which expresses the resolve of a people imbued with a divine mission, united for the purpose of perfecting the world.

From this perspective, we can well understand the initial description of the Rosh Hashana shofar blowing as 'a day of the broken, weeping sound' (Yom t'rua yiheyeh lachem - Numbers 29:1), since Rosh Hashana - the anniversary of the creation of the world - brought us into a not-yet-redeemed world, replete with suffering. But on Rosh Hashana we add the exultant t'kiya sound whose source is the redemption of the Jubilee Year, the culmination of seven continuous seven-year cycles when everyone is free and secure in his/her homestead, and which serves as a metaphor for world redemption and salvation (Leviticus 25: 8-10).

The very word 'shofar' means beautiful and complete; the victorious t'kiya sound comes to remind us that by acts of repentance we have the ability to change this vale of tears, to perfect the world under the kingship of the divine. Rav Soloveitchik maintains that this is particularly true when it comes to our national covenant, since our greatest challenge is to transform fate into destiny, our persecuted encampment into a nation of G-d's witnesses dedicated to redeeming the world with love and peace. And in our creation of the State of Israel from the ashes of Auschwitz, we did in fact demonstrate our ability to sublimate enslavement into a firm resolve to reestablish ourselves as a free

nation founded on democratic principles and dedicated to rooting out terrorism everywhere.

As it applies to the national sphere, so too it applies to the personal sphere. Every individual is born to a certain set of parents in a certain place at a certain time, and is subject to certain genetic limitations; all these factors comprise the individual's fate.

However, to turn fate into destiny, to take lemons and make lemonade, is the greatest challenge of anyone's life. Whenever I feel stymied or dismayed by the 'un-luck of the draw,' I think of Rav Moshe Epstein, whose response to the reality that the children born into his family were born deaf was to establish an international Yeshiva for the Deaf, the first of its kind. And I think of young Dassie Rabinovitch, a teenager whose response to her fatal cancer diagnosis was to start giving lectures to high-school students on how her illness made her appreciate each moment of life and how her chemotherapy brought her closer to G-d.

Instead of cursing the darkness we must concentrate on making light; the sobbing t'ruah sound of our hearts must turn into a victorious tekiyah shout of faith in our G-d of redemption. ©2009 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Fatherly Rebuke

This week's portion ends with a disheartening story, one that Jews are reminded to recount every day of their lives. The great prophetess, Miriam, sister of Moshe and heroine to a nation, spoke lashon horah (gossip) about her brother Moshe, "regarding the Cushite woman he had married. And Hashem heard." (Numbers 12:3)

She was upset at Moshe's righteous reaction to his omnipresent Divine communication, which had him separate from an intimate matrimonial life. "(Miriam) said (to Ahron), 'Was it only to Moshe that Hashem spoke? Did He not speak to us, as well?'"(ibid v.3)

After harsh rebuke from the Almighty for the audacity to speak against her brother Moshe, the world's greatest prophet and most humble man, Miriam was punished with leprosy. Her skin turned white as snow. But Moshe was not daunted by her remarks. His unyielding concern for her welfare proved itself as he fervently prayed for her immediate recovery and looked for Divine direction for the next step of penitence.

"Hashem said to Moshe, 'Were her father to spit in her face, would she not be humiliated for seven days? Let her be quarantined outside the camp for seven days, and then she may be brought in.'"(ibid v.14)The Talmud in Tractate Bava Kama, infers a logical supposition: if a father's wrath would result in a seven-day quarantine, surely (kal v'chomer) G-d's wrath should effect a fourteen-day punishment. However, an integral component of Talmudic exegesis states that a law that is derived by a kal v'chomer (a fortiori

conclusion) can be only as strict as the baseline law from which it is derived, and not go beyond it. Therefore, even as a consequence of G-d's reprimand, surely more potent than a father's rebuke, would also warrant only be a seven-day punishment.

For example, if assault warrants a 30-day prison sentence, the logic of kal v'chomer cannot help us deduce that the crime of murder would warrant the death penalty. It can only meet the level of the baseline premise. Thus, if assault warrants a 30-day prison sentence, surely, or kal v'chomer, murder would warrant a 30-day prison sentence. For a longer sentence you would need a direct command.

However, while Divine chastisement should warrant a harsher ban, nevertheless, since Hashem used a fatherly analogy, Miriam was spared and only excommunicated for seven days. The question is why did Hashem use the parental analogy and thus limit the punishment to seven days? If there was a slight to the Divinity, then why not immediately use the Divine analogy to inflict a harsher punishment? What did Hashem want in mitigating the reprimand by asking, "If her father would spit in her face, would she not be humiliated for seven days.?"

William Howard Taft, the 27th President of the United States, did not have a record as chief executive without distinction, though it was beclouded by the bitter political factional quarrel that ended his presidency after one term.

He was sitting at the supper table with his family one evening, and, as children sometimes do, his son directed a disrespectful remark toward him.

Mrs. Taft looked at her husband and exclaimed, "I am sure you will not let that pass unpunished!"

Taft replied, "If he directed the remark toward me as President of the United States, I will let it pass as his Constitutional right. However, as a father to his child, I will surely deal with this abuse!"

Perhaps Hashem, in reprimanding Miriam as a father and not the Divine Presence, sent us all a message about the pain of lashon horah. Lashon Horah is considered a terrible sin. The Torah has no less than 31 warnings concerning that crime, and it is incumbent upon Jews to remember the story of Miriam as a daily reminder of the difficult test we face in our encounters and our oral reactions to them.

However, Hashem did not want to rebuke Miriam as Master of the Universe. He did not use the severity of the rebuke of the Divine Presence to ban her from the camp for fourteen days. Instead, he used a parental analogy, "If her father would spit." His rebuke did not come as a King but rather as a Father, hurt and dismayed about how one of his children talked against a sibling.

If we fail to avoid speaking lashon horah because of the pain that it inflicts upon our fellow Jews, I will give you another reason. Worry about the pain we inflict upon our Father in Heaven when we talk ill of his

children. Think about how a parent cries when he sees his children quibble, and then remember that it is also Our Father in Heaven who hears how we talk about our sisters and brothers. © 2009 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Moshe (Moses) had many qualities that we should emulate. Yet, the quality that he was possibly the most famous for was his humility. This week's portion tells us of this unparalleled humility. In the words of the Torah, "now the man Moses was very humble above all people." (Numbers 12:3) How does one attain this most important quality?

Maimonides argues that in life one should always try for the middle road, the golden mean. Humility, however, is so difficult to achieve, that Maimonides feels that one should try to go to the extreme, becoming absolutely self-effacing. Unable to reach that level, Maimonides argues one will fall short and automatically reach the middle level.

By taking a closer look at the verse from the Torah, we find another approach to humility. At first blush, Moshe's actions seem to reinforce the suggestion that he was extraordinarily humble. After all, when Moshe is told that two men, Eldad and Medad were prophesying in the midst of the camp, he was not upset. Indeed, rather than seeing Eldad and Medad as threats, Moshe declares "would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His spirit upon them." (Numbers 11:29)

It appears that here Moshe is expressing deep humility and, therefore, declares "let others be prophets just as I am."

But a closer look may suggest an opposite idea. Moshe may have recognized his limitations and, thus, was able to step back and allow others to assume prophetic leadership. In a certain sense this gracious act may have reflected his self confidence, rather than his meekness. Assured of his own capabilities, he was not threatened by Eldad or Medad.

Herein lies an important message. Humility doesn't mean thinking little of oneself. All of us created in the image of G-d should feel a sense of self worth in our abilities to succeed. It is this confidence that gave Moshe the inner strength to share leadership with others.

From this perspective, humility is the assessing of oneself in relationship to G-d. It is within that comparison that one recognizes how small one is. In fact, the closer one is to G-d, and Moshe was the closest to Him, the more one recognizes one's finitude in comparison to G-d's infinite nature.

A story teaches this lesson. The great Hafez Chaim was among the humblest of people. Once, on a train, a fellow passenger, who did not recognize this

famous rabbi, lauded the Hafez Chaim to his face. The Hafez Chaim responded that he knew him personally and knew that he actually had many weaknesses. The passenger was outraged and slapped him. When coming to the next town, and realizing who he had slapped, he begged the great rabbi for forgiveness.

"No" responded the Hafez Chaim. "There is no need to apologize. I was wrong in belittling myself."

The upshot: humility should not be associated with putting oneself down. But rather this valuable quality should emerge from the recognition that as much as we, created in the image of G-d, can do, it is but a fraction of the endless power of the Almighty.

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RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

What was the secret of the greatness of Moses? What special qualities made him stand out as the greatest spiritual leader in the history of the Jewish people? How did he reach the supreme level of prophecy, far surpassing all previous and subsequent prophets? In this week's reading, the Torah gives us the answer. Moses may have been the greatest person in the history of the world, but he was also the most humble. In fact, his humility was the key to his greatness. The commentators, however, are puzzled by the context in which the Torah chooses to record this endorsement of Moses.

Towards the end of this week's portion, we read that Aaron and Miriam took their brother Moses to task for separating from his wife. Why was it necessary, they contended, to withdraw from ordinary life? After all, they were also blessed with the gift of prophecy and they still had normal spousal relationships. At this point, the Torah interrupts the story to tell us about Moses's humility. Then the story is continued. Hashem reprimands them severely for their slander, and Miriam is punished.

Why does the comment about Moses's humility belong right in the middle of this episode?

The commentators explain that very often people who set off in pursuit of spiritual greatness remove themselves from human society and isolate themselves from contact with other people. This, however, is not the path towards spiritual growth that the Torah advocates. Such people may indeed expand their awareness of the Creator, but at the same time they are also expanding their awareness of themselves. By focusing on their own goals, ideals and aspirations at the expense of other people, they are inevitably channeling their lives into a selfish direction. This is not what the Torah wants.

Miriam suspected that Moses had separated from his wife because he hoped this would bring him to

higher spiritual levels. She suspected he was selfishly willing to sacrifice his spousal relationship to advance his own personal spiritual goals, regardless of how his wife was affected. Therefore, she took him to task for being so focused on his own goals that he became insensitive to the needs of others, in this case his own wife.

Not so, the Torah bears witness. Moses was the ultimate humble man, without a single selfish bone in his body, and his decision to separate from his wife was clearly not for his own aggrandizement but for the greater good of the Jewish people.

A young fellow once traveled to a faraway land to study in the academy of a great sage. After the first day, he heard two of the older students conversing about the wisdom of the sage.

"Oh, the words of the sage are like the sun," said one of the students. When I listen to him I realize that I am absolutely nothing. That's all I am. A great big nothing."

His friend nodded sagely. "I know exactly how you feel. I feel exactly the same way. When I sit at his feet, listening to the pearls of wisdom pouring from his lips, I realize am just a nothing, a living, breathing nothing."

The new student was very moved and inspired. "Me, too," he cried out. "When I look at the glowing face of the sage, I realize that I too am just a nothing."

One of the older students turned to the new student and fixed him with an eagle stare. "Listen to this!" he exclaimed. "This fellow has just arrived in the academy, and already he presumes to be a nothing."

In our own lives, we often find ourselves taking the high ground in various circumstances and professing moral indignation about the behavior of other people. In such cases, we would do well to take out a little time for introspection and examine our motivations. If there is even the least bit of self-interest involved, if we seek to show that we have a higher standard than other people, then we would do better to remain silent.

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RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week we read the parsha of B'haaloscha. "Speak to Aharon and say to him: When you kindle the lights; toward that central light on the Menorah itself (the Menorah was comprised of a center column, referred to as 'the Menorah itself,' with three branches rising out of each side of that central column) shall all seven lights cast their illumination. [8:2]"

Why does this parsha of the kindling of the Menorah follow immediately after the parsha dealing with the offerings brought by the Nesiim {Princes} of each tribe? Aharon felt a lacking when he saw the representatives of each tribe bringing their offerings while he and his tribe of Levi were not represented.

Hashem consoled Aharon by informing him that his portion is greater than theirs—he kindles the lights of the Menorah. [Rashi 8:2]

The twelve Nesiim each brought the following offerings for the consecration of the altar: a silver k'arah {dish} and a silver basin, each filled with a mixture of flour and oil; a golden pan filled with incense and numerous animals to be sacrificed.

Although the identical offering was brought by each of them, the Torah deemed it worthwhile and necessary to spell out the details of these offerings twelve separate times. Why was this done?

The Ramban [7:4-5] explains that these identical offerings that were brought did not come about through a collective decision that was reached. Rather, each of the Nesiim, based totally on their personal reasoning, thought to bring this offering.

Each of the tribes had been told by Yaakov of the unique role and position that they would serve in Klal Yisroel {Yisroel as a whole}. The first to bring the offering was Nachshon from the tribe of Yehuda. From his tribe would come the royal kingdom of Israel. He therefore brought a bowl, representing the oceans that surround the earth and a basin, representing the round earth. His tribe, with the advent of the Moshiach {Messiah}, would supply the king who would include all of that in his dominion.

The second offering was brought by Nesanel from the tribe of Yissachar. He brought the same exact offering as Nachshon but for very different reasons. The tribe of Yissachar was wholly dedicated to Torah study. Torah is compared to bread because it sustains the spiritual aspects of man as bread sustains the physical aspects. Each loaf of the Lechem Hapanim {the special bread that were on the Shulchan-Table of the Mishkan-Tabernacle}, which represented this concept, was shaped by a k'arah. That was what Nesanel had in mind when he, representing the tribe of dedication to Torah study, brought the silver k'arah as his offering.

The third offering was brought by Eliav from the tribe of Zevulun. They were sea merchants who used the proceeds of their commerce to form a partnership with Yissachar. By graciously providing the material support for Yissachar, they equally divided the spiritual riches of Yissachar's labor. Eliav brought a k'arah, resembling the sea upon which his tribe would travel.

The same applied to the remaining nine tribes. Each brought an offering that represented their unique involvement and that offering happened to be identical to that which each of the other tribes brought. That is why the gifts were spelled out in detail a total of twelve times—once for each tribe.

Perhaps that was the cause of Aharon's feeling that he and his tribe were lacking because they had not brought this offering. Were they lacking a special, unique contribution to Klal Yisroel?

Hashem answered that he would be kindling the lights of the Menorah and as such, his was greater

than theirs. What was this special aspect of the Menorah?

The Menorah was comprised of a center column with three branches rising out of each side. The Sforno explains that the three branches on the right represent those whose involvement is in the spiritual realm. The three branches on the left represent those who involve themselves in the materialistic realm in order to aid those involved in the spiritual. All six wicks pointed inward toward the main column of the Menorah which rose straight up toward the heaven, representing that all actions of this world must be dedicated and focused toward serving Hashem.

The middah {attribute} of Aharon and his descendants—disciples is a pursuer of peace. A pursuer of peace recognizes that dissension is not necessarily the result of one party being right and the other wrong. Rather, it can come about as a result of different views and perspectives on a given situation. One can be at peace with everyone when one recognizes the unique aspects and contributions that each individual offers. Even though different people's ways might be different, it is only the combination of each contribution that brings about the complete sanctification of Hashem's name.

The offerings of each of the Nesiim represented their unique path in serving Hashem. The Menorah represented the synthesis of all those paths into one heavenly thrust. Aharon was chosen to kindle the lights of the Menorah and to kindle the flames of peace and unity in the heart of each and every Jew. As such, Hashem told Aharon that there is no need for you to feel lacking. Yours is far greater than theirs. © 2009 Rabbi Y. Ciner & Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah gives us a profound insight into the spiritual direction of our present exile and final redemption. The haftorah begins with the prophet Zecharya experiencing a vision wherein the ordained High Priest, Yehoshua, was brought to a critical trial regarding his pending esteemed position. Zecharya says, "And I was shown the High Priest Yehoshua standing before Hashem's prosecuting angel." (3:1) The reason for this prosecution is stated shortly thereafter in the following words, "And Yehoshua was clothed with soiled garments." (3:3) Our Chazal explain that these garments refer to the wives of Yehoshua's descendants. Although Yehoshua was personally a very pious individual some of his children were adversely affected by the foreign environment of Babylonia. They strayed from their rich heritage of priesthood and married women prohibited to them due to their lofty ritual status. Because of this offense to the priesthood, Yehoshua's personal status of the High Priest was under severe scrutiny.

Suddenly, an angel of Hashem interceded on behalf of Yehoshua and defeated the prosecuting angel with the following statement of defense. "Is Yehoshua not an ember rescued from the fire!? (3:2) This response of defense was quite favorable in the eyes of Hashem and Yehoshua was immediately restored to his lofty position. The angel responded and said, "Remove the soiled garments from upon Yehoshua... See that I have removed his sin from him... Dress him with new garments." The prophet continues, "And they placed the pure priestly turban on his head." (3:4) Rashi (adloc.) explains that Yehoshua was granted the opportunity of rectifying his children's behavior and he successfully influenced them to divorce their wives and marry more appropriate ones. Once Yehoshua's garments-referring to his children's inappropriate spouses- were cleansed Hashem clothed Yehoshua with the priestly garb and restored him to the position of Kohain Gadol.

What was the angel's powerful defense that produced such immediate favorable results? After his sons' disgrace to the priesthood, what outstanding merit could Yehoshua have possessed that secured his lofty position? The Radak explains that the angel argued that Yehoshua was "an ember rescued from fire." Radak understands this to mean that Yehoshua had been previously thrown into a fiery furnace. He sacrificed his life for the sake of Hashem and was miraculously spared from the fire. Through this heroic act, Yehoshua demonstrated total submission for the sake of Heaven offering his life for Hashem's glory. Such individuals deserve to prominently serve Hashem and His people. Such devotion and commitment must be inculcated into the blood stream of the Jewish people. Although Yehoshua's children veered from the straight path there remained much hope for them.

The shining example of their father could surely inspire them to return from their inappropriate ways. They too could eventually become devout servants of Hashem and attain lofty levels of priesthood. Through their father's guidance they could also rise above their physical and mundane pursuits and develop the purest qualities. In fact, Yehoshua was told that his children could potentially perfect themselves beyond normal levels of human achievement. Hashem said, "I will establish them superior to these angels standing here." (3:7) Yes, Yehoshua's submissiveness could produce untold results and certainly lead his children back to perfect spirituality.

This same lesson is taught to us in this week's parsha regarding the newly appointed judges. We read about the masses of Jewish people straying from the perfect path demonstrating serious leanings towards certain physical and inappropriate dimensions of life. They disgraced the Heavenly manna bread which Hashem sent them on a daily basis and expressed their physical cravings for substitute foods such as; melons, onions and garlic. They even complained about the Torah's strict standards of morality and sought freedom

from its taxing and demanding life. Hashem responded with a severe punishment which ended the lives of many thousands of Jewish people. But at the same time Hashem responded to a plea from Moshe Rabbeinu and instituted a structure of seventy elders to share the judicial responsibilities. During this process these hand-picked judges experienced an incredible transition. The Torah states, "And Hashem intensified the Heavenly Spirit which rested upon Moshe Rabbeinu and shared it with the seventy elders." (Bamidbar 11:25) In addition to their new position as judges, these elders received prophecy and merited for a short time, to actually serve as a sanctuary for the Divine Presence.

Rashi comments on this incident and reveals the secret identity of the seventy elders. He quotes Chazal who explain, "These were the Jewish policemen in Egypt who were beaten mercilessly instead of their Jewish brethren." (Rashi to Bamidbar 11:16) These elders refused to enforce upon their brethren the unreasonable Egyptian demands and opted to accept torturous Egyptian blows on behalf of their brethren. This previous heroic act of self negation now served as a meaningful merit and lesson for the Jewish people. The recent outburst of the Jewish people revealed that they were embarking upon an immoral path, focusing on pleasure and self pursuit. Hashem responded to this by elevating a host of their own peers to the lofty position of leadership. These elders were not ensnared by self pursuit but were instead perfect role models of self negation. Their interest lay in spiritual association with Hashem and their selfless efforts brought them to the lofty achievement of personal sanctuaries for the presence of Hashem. With such personalities at the head of the Jewish people their direction could be effectively reversed. Their self sacrifice could secure the Jewish survival and hopefully remind the Jewish people never to plunge into self pursuit and immorality.

In our present times we hear repeated vibes of similar physical calls to immorality. We realize that our predecessors were also embers rescued from the fiery furnace-the fires of Europe-and their self sacrifice for the sake of Hashem surely serves as an everlasting merit for us. Our recollections of their total devotion to Hashem is a significant factor in the incredible transition for many of us from total physical pursuits to a sincere yearning to become sanctuaries of Hashem. May this new development continue to flourish and contribute to the hastening of Mashiach we so anxiously await.

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