

# NEVER LOSE THAT SENSE OF WONDER

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

Why is the subject of the Menorah juxtaposed to the subject of the princes? When Aaron saw the inaugural gifts of the princes he became disappointed that neither he nor his tribe was included. The Holy One blessed be He said to him, "I promise that yours is greater than theirs, because you are charged with lighting and preparing the Menorah!" (Rashi)

*And Aaron did so.... he kindled the lamps, as Hashem had commanded Moses.* (Bamidbar 8:3)

This is to teach the praise of Aaron that he did not deviate. (Rashi)

What's the great praise for Aaron that he didn't deviate? Is there something extra hard about lighting a Menorah? Would any of us swerve from duty in the face of a direct executive command from The Almighty Himself? Could we do any different? Then what's the big deal? What's the praise? There must be some reasonable explanation.

The Sefas Emes says that the greatness of Aaron was that he didn't change in his level of excitement for the rest of his life. He goes on to explain that it's not any easy task. Naturally a person's enthusiasm wanes with the passage of time. He needs to constantly seek out new ways to experience the act done daily for almost 40 years as if it was the first time.

The challenge is compounded by the fact that Aaron must have been supremely relieved and entirely invigorated by his surprise appointment to light the Menorah. How do you match that performance day after day? That perhaps is the great praise of Aaron that he didn't deviate. How did he do it?

One Rosh Hashana morning before davening, I found the speaker who was scheduled to deliver the keynote address before the sounding of the Shofar deep in thought. In making the schedule he had given us the name of one of his most recent books for the title of that day's talk. This person has authored many books. I put my hand on his shoulder and asked him in a friendly way, "Are you getting ready?" He glanced at me and said, "I can't remember what I wrote in that book?" He looked at me as if he needed some help. So I offered some.

I asked him, "Do you think Leonardo Divinci could paint the Mona Lisa a second time by looking at the original and trying to copy it." The answer was, "Of course not!" I suggested that rather than trying to remember and repeat what he wrote in the book he would be better off thinking about what he would write in a book with that same title now! He seemed to like my suggestion or he was just

being very polite.

In either case I think it's an idea that liberates the creative spirit from mere repetition even when confronting a repetitive action. Instead of doing what I did, I need to do what I would if I was doing now for the first time.

Maybe now we can appreciate the singularity of King David's request based on the verse, "One thing I asked of Hashem and that I shall quest for: Would that I dwell in the House of Hashem all the days of my life to behold the pleasantness of Hashem and to visit in His sanctuary. (Psalms 27:4) The Vilna Gaon points out that King David seems to be asking to "dwell" in the beginning of the verse and to just "visit" in the end. Which is it?

He explains that there is an advantage and a disadvantage to being both a denizen and a visitor. Most of us can only imagine how amazing it would be to live in one of those apartments in Jerusalem that stand just opposite the Western Wall. The upside we understand. You're always there. The downside however is that when the novelty wears off we tend to take things for granted and be much less impressed as time goes on.

A visitor has a sense of freshness and surprise at having arrived. Unfortunately the time comes when he must leave and "parting is such sweet sorrow". King David requests the advantage of both, and this can apply to many fixtures in our lives, to be there daily and to never lose that sense of wonder.

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