

# MAN OF THE MASSES

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

"And Aaron did thus; toward the face of the Menorah he kindled its lights, as Hashem had commanded Moshe." (8:3)

"And Aaron did thus - This is a telling praise of Aaron; that he did not deviate." (Rashi)

Mefarshim question the above Rashi. Is this the greatest praise of Aaron - that he did not deviate? Surely even a person of lesser stature than Aaron would not have deviated from the word of Hashem. And for that matter, why would Aaron even want to deviate? There was nothing particularly difficult about the mitzvah of cleaning and lighting the lamps of the Menorah.

Rashi, citing Midrash Tanchuma, explains why this passage regarding the Menorah is written in the Torah immediately following the offerings of the tribal leaders (which was at the end of last week's sidrah). Aaron felt he had been blemished: Every tribe had been represented by its leader in the inaugural service of the Mishkan (Tabernacle) except his tribe, the tribe of Levi. "Perhaps," he thought to himself, "it is because of my own personal faults and unworthiness that my tribe has been excluded."

This week's sidrah begins with Hashem's response to Aaron: "I promise you" says Hashem, "that your role in the Mishkan services is greater than theirs. For to you I have given the beautiful mitzvah of cleaning and kindling the Menorah flames every day."

Rabbi Meir of Premishlan zt"l (quoted in Sifsei Tzaddikim) explains that the Midrash states that Aaron was a man of the people. He mingled among them and visited them in their tents. If Aaron saw two people in an argument, he would go back and forth from one to the other until he had restored peace and friendship. If he encountered someone who did not know how to pray, or to learn Torah, Aaron would teach them. Every day, he would go from tent to tent, visiting and greeting the people. When a person desired to sin, he would desist, thinking to himself, "Tomorrow, Aaron the High Priest will come here to say good morning, and he will see in my eyes that I have sinned." Sometimes Aaron would find a husband and wife who had separated due to marital strife. He would not rest until he had succeeded in bringing them back together. Later, if the wife became pregnant and gave birth to a boy, she would inevitably name him Aaron, in virtue of the fact that it was because of Aaron that they had remained together and had not been divorced. In fact, Chazal (our Sages) teach that more than three thousand children were named after Aaron during his lifetime. (Otzar haMidrashim quoting Avos d'Rabbi Nassan)

Now Aaron had been elevated to new heights. He was honoured and entrusted with the most beautiful service in the Mishkan; kindling the flames of the Menorah. A person of lesser character and integrity than Aaron might easily have contracted a case of swollen-ego at such a juncture. After all, had not Hashem Himself told him that, "Your role is greater than theirs." It would have been natural for Aaron to become reclusive and protective of his position. It would not be expected of one given the exclusive and unparalleled appointment of Kohen Gadol (High Priest) to circulate among the common folk to solve their domestic squabbles, nor to teach prayer and Alef-Beis to illiterates.

But we are talking about Aaron, who's greatness was outdone only by his humility. Each day, after performing the sublime Menorah service, Aaron never forgot his other "position". Just as he always had, he would leave the Tabernacle and wander among the common folk, looking for ways to bring peace and harmony among friends, to teach Torah and morality to the masses, and to bring all who encountered him closer to their Maker.

This, says Rabbi Meir, is the praise of Aaron: He did not deviate. Even after reaching the pinnacle of success, he never changed. He was still the same old Aaron, knocking on doors and greeting his fellow with a bright smile and an encouraging word.

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