

# MAKING NO DIFFERENCE

*by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann*

At the beginning of this week's sidrah, Behaloscha, Hashem (G-d) commands Aaron to light the seven-lamp Menorah of the Mishkan (Tabernacle).

*Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, "Speak to Aaron, say to him, 'When you kindle the lamps, towards the face (middle) of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light.'... And Aaron did so!"*

Mefarshim (Torah commentators) are puzzled by the need for the Torah to tell us that, "Aaron did so." One would only assume that Aaron - Kohen Gadol (High Priest) and devoted servant of Hashem - did exactly what Hashem told him to. Nothing else could be imagined.

Rashi, seemingly disturbed by this question, says the following:

And Aaron did so - this teaches the praise of Aaron; that he did not deviate.

If Rashi was indeed bothered by the need of the Torah to write, "And Aaron did so," then his explanation is all the more puzzling. Is the entire praise of Aaron merely that "he did so?" Wouldn't most people have done what Hashem commanded, particularly since the commandment to light the Menorah doesn't seem to be a very difficult one?

Many answers are given to this question. Chasam Sofer (Derashos p. 787) writes that the "praise of Aaron" was in that he did not delegate the task of lighting the Menorah to one of the subordinate Kohanim, even though it was on this very day that Aaron's two sons, Nadav and Avihu, died. One might have thought that Aaron was in no mood to light the Menorah after having lost his children so tragically and suddenly. Since halacha (Jewish law) permits him to delegate the task, it would have seemed completely appropriate to do so. But he did not. And Aaron did so - he put aside his personal considerations, and performed the mitzvah (commandment) of lighting the lamps with joy, thereby demonstrating his absolute acceptance of Divine providence and Hashem's will.

The holy tzaddik, Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk, when he was a young man, would often take leave of his family and spend extended periods travelling through the towns and villages of Poland and Russia. He travelled as a simple beggar, wandering from township to township, never staying long enough to feel comfortable. (The suffering of "exile" was seen as a method of attaining atonement for one's sins. It was also used as a path to character refinement, by having to deal with and accept the hardships which such travel entailed.)

One time, after an extended period of exile, R' Elimelech decided the time had come to return home.

Just as he entered Lizhensk, he heard someone cry out, "Quick - call a doctor; Eluzer is sick!" R' Elimelech's oldest son was named Eluzer. Assuming it was his Eluzer who was sick, R' Elimelech became panic-stricken and began running toward his home.

Realizing what had happened, someone called out to him, "Don't worry - it's not your Eluzer that's sick; it's Eluzer so-and-so!" R' Elimelech stopped running; he was greatly relieved. He began thanking and praising Hashem that all was well. Then he stopped; his face took on an expression of disgust. "Meilech, Meilech," he said to himself, "what have you accomplished with all your months of exile - if it still makes a difference to you whose Eluzer is sick?!" Then and there he decided that he had evidently not yet suffered enough. And with that, R' Elimelech turned around, left Lizhensk, and went back into exile.

With this story, explains the Bobover Rebbe shlita (may he have a refuah shleimah), we can homiletically explain the aforementioned Rashi. Commentaries explain that the lamps of the Menorah allude to the Jewish soul, as it is written (Mishlei/Proverbs 20:27), "For the lamp of Hashem is a man's soul." Aaron, the Kohen Gadol, would "light the candles" by trying to light up the neshamos of those Jews who feel "extinguished," distant and forlorn.

Normally, one who dedicates himself to such work (and whose time is ultimately limited) will at times "play favourites," choosing to give his limited time to members of his own family, tribe, or to others with whom he has some connection. But not Aaron. He loved every Jew as he did his own child. "This teaches the praise of Aaron; that he did not deviate" - it made no difference; his commitment to each-and- every Jew was complete. Aaron played no favourites; young or old, Ashkenazi or Sefardi, rich or poor, Aaron loved and spent time encouraging and assisting them all.

In our times, when rifts between different factions of Judaism seem to continually grow and escalate, there is much to be learned from Aaron, whose ahavas Yisrael (love for his fellow Jew) overcame all boundaries and differences.

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