

# LEFT OUT? LEFT IN.

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

Aharon HaKohen. As Moshe Rabbeinu told his brother, his mitzvah of Menorah would be greater than what the Nesi'im did with their sacrifices.

At least that is what Rashi says. The Ramban has a different take on the form of consolation. The mitzvah of lighting the Menorah he says wasn't much comfort for being left out of the inauguration offerings since any kohen could light it. Instead, the Ramban says, the Menorah was an allusion to when the kohanim would eventually and heroically rededicate the altar in the time of the Chashmonaim.

There might be another explanation as well, one that can be traced back to the very origin of the tribe of Levi. It may even be an explanation for another question to do with the birth of Moshe Rabbeinu, based upon the following verse:

A man of the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi. (Shemos 2:1)

This of course is referring to Amram and Yocheved, just after Miriam convinced her father to remarry her mother. Pharaoh, she argued, only declared death for the boys. Amram, by causing all Jewish men to divorce their wives and not have children, decreed against the boys AND the girls.

The question is, why were they not mentioned by name? It wasn't as if it was loshon hara, and that we didn't already know who the Torah is talking about.

A clue to the answer can be found in Parashas Ki Sisa:

Moshe stood in the gate of the camp and said: "Whoever is for God, [let him come] to me!"

All the Levi'im gathered around him. He said to them: "God has said, the God of Israel: 'Every man should place his sword upon his thigh and pass back and forth from one gate to the other in the camp, and every man should kill his brother, every man his friend, every man his brother.' "

The Levi'im did as Moshe said . . . (Shemos 32:26-28)

The incident of the golden calf necessitated the death of its perpetrators. Moshe turned to the people to help him with the very unpleasant task, and the only ones to respond were the Levi'im. The Levi'im were the only ones prepared to carry out Divine justice on behalf of God.

Was this a good thing? Maybe the Levi'im were bloodthirsty, and this was their chance to take lives with Divine sanction. There was nothing heroic about that.

In response to this, we have the following:

[Leah] conceived again and bore a son, and she said, "Now this time my husband will be attached to me, for I have borne him three sons." Therefore, He named him "Levi." (Bereishis 29:24)

It is important to note that in Biblical times, names were more than just a way with which to refer to another person. They were actually a description of the nature of the person himself, evident by the way the name follows its explanation. "Levi" is from a word that means to accompany, making it a "relationship" name.

In other words, it was antithetical to Levi's nature to want to kill anyone. That is why he is praised so much for carrying out the deed. The only reason why he could carry it out, and with zealousness was because NOT doing God's will was even MORE antithetical to his nature.

Thus, Levi gives himself over completely to the will of God. What he wants is completely secondary to what God desires. When he performs a mitzvah, he leaves his own want out of the equation.

Therefore the Torah, by referring to Amram and Yocheved by their tribal name and not their personal names indicates that they acted completely with self-sacrifice for God. There was nothing of themselves in what they did, though that could easily have been the case.

After all, Amram and Yocheved had not divorced because they had stopped wanting to be married to one another. They had separated to stop giving birth to babies who were sentenced to death before even being born. Finding a good reason to remarry would have, SHOULD HAVE stirred personal sentiments.

The verse tells you otherwise. It doesn't say that they were not elated to remarry. It tells you that even though they were they would not have, had it not been in God's best interest. It was such a "Levi thing" to do.

When listing the gifts of the altar inauguration, the Torah not only mentions the name of the tribe, but the name of its nasi as well. It's as if the name of the nasi was a crucial part of the equation, without which our appreciation of what went on would be limited. Indeed, this information is dissected and analyzed in Kabbalistic seforim.

It is also saying that there was something personal about the offerings that were brought. In this case, it was desired by God because it was a necessary element to make the inauguration complete. Just as white light ceases to be white if a color of the spectrum is filtered out, likewise the inauguration was only complete if all 12 elements of the nation came together as one.

Except for Levi. It was never his job to supply one of those elements because he doesn't have that kind of personal involvement in this world. As his name implies, Levi is here to bind together, not to be bound up with others. In the future, he will be the 13th tribe, the gematria of the word "echad," which means "one." This is what Moshe Rabbeinu told his brother.

Aharon HaKohen, on behalf of his tribe, had felt left out, especially since he had thought it was the result of his involvement in the golden calf. Moshe Rabbeinu told him that he was "left out" because he had something greater to do. It was something only the Levi'im could accomplish because of their heroic selflessness.

This was symbolized by the Menorah as Rashi comments, and was revealed in full in the time of the Chashmonaim as the Ramban explains. It is was also a profound sense of comfort for Aharon HaKohen, the very representative of what it means to give yourself up for the greater good.