

# CLEANING TORAH

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

This week's Parsha is the Parsha of challenge and leadership. It begins with Aharon's special Mitzvah of preparing and lighting the Menorah and concludes with the humility of Moshe and the leprosy of Miriam. In between those two bookends of the Parsha the stage was set for the disaster of the Miraglim (Spies) and death of the generation of the Exodus.

From the beginning of the Parsha until Shishi (6th section) the Torah continues the theme of the nation's preparation for entering the Promised Land.

Yisro (Jethro) is reintroduced to us and elects to go off on his own to teach monotheism to the non-Jews. Starting with Chapter 11 the entire complexion of the Parsha changes.

(11:1) *"The people took to seeking complaints"*

The honeymoon was over and the job of working through the demands and responsibilities of having a real relationship with G-d became paramount. Time after time the Jews demanded proof of G-d's loving benevolence. Because they feared hunger G-d gave them Mana. Because they wanted meat instead of Mana G-d sent the quail. Because Moshe expressed his frustration with the complaining nation G-d granted him the help of the Sanhedrin (supreme court). Finally, even the great Miriam questioned Moshe's divinity and was punished with leprosy. This sequence of "issues" is followed with next week's disastrous story of the Spies, their failure to elevate the nation's faith in G-d, and their failure to strengthen the nation's commitment to the Jewish national mission.

Let's take a seconds look at this week's "issues."

1. Aharon's lighting of the Menorah underscored his position as one of the nation's three most important leaders.
2. The final organization and travels of the Bnai Yisroel symbolically positioned the Jews as the spiritual leaders and teachers of the world. (Note: The focus on Yisro as a teacher to the non-Jewish world.)
3. The challenges to Moshe recorded after Shishi (third section) resulted in the appointment of the Sanhedrin (supreme court) to help him govern and teach.
4. The story of Aharon and Miriam's challenge to Moshe's leadership and the punishment of Miriam's leprosy underscore the divine quality of Moshe's being chosen to lead the Jews into Eretz Yisroel.

Obviously, the entire Parsha is about leadership, it's qualities, responsibilities, and divinity.

My Father Shlit'a shared with me an amazing insight from the Avnei Nezer (father of the Shem Mishmuel) that puts this week's focus on leadership into perspective.

Why did the Parsha begin with Aharon's Mitzvah to prepare and light the candles? The Avnei Nezer explains as follows. There are two parts to the Mitzvah of lighting the Menorah. 1. The cleaning of the Menorah in preparation for the lighting. 2. The actual lighting of the Menorah.

The cleaning and preparing of the Menorah had to be done by a Kohain; however, any Jew could do the actual lighting. What is so important about the cleaning of the Menorah that only a Kohain could do it?

When fire burns it consumes fuel that results in heat, light, and a black residue called carbon. The carbon is a byproduct of the impurities in the fuel that are not combustible. It is the burnt impurities that the Kohain must clean before anyone else could light the Menorah. The Avnei Nezer explained that the job of the Kohain, and by extension all Torah leadership, is to do more than just teach. The process of teaching is such that innovation and creativity, personal understanding and expression must get mixed in. It is the stature of the teacher that determines how pure the Torah he teaches will be. It is the job of the "Kohain" to make sure that the Torah being disseminated down through the generations is cleansed of all its impurities. It is the job of the Torah leadership in each generation to remove the false from the true.

The verse states, "The Kohain's lips protects the knowledge of G-d." We know that there was a special emphasis on inducting Kohanim into the Sanhedrin. The tribe of Layvie was gifted with the time to study and teach G-d's word. They did not have a landed portion in Eretz Yisroel. Instead, "G-d was their portion." They were supposed to be supported by the established "gifts" (Terumah and Maaser - tithes) given by the rest of the nation. The rest of their time was spent officiating in the Temple and teaching the people.

It takes purity to understand falsehood. It is by contrast to the Torah one knows to be true and pure that he can identify the impure and the false. Besides Moshe Rabbeinu, Aharon was the purest of them all. Moshe was above and beyond the people. On the other hand, Aharon was seen as from within the people. He had suffered with them in the years of slavery and he had gained their love and trust. The nation could far better relate to Aharon as a role model than they could to Moshe.

Aharon Hakohain was not included among the other Princes who had brought their gift at the inauguration of the Mizbeach (alter). Therefore, as the first Rashi of the Parsha explains, G-d told him that his part in the Mishkan would be far greater than all the other Princes. "You will be the one to prepare and light the Menorah." Aharon represented all the subsequent Torah scholars who would be responsible for the accurate transmission of the Torah taught to the Bnai Yisroel by Moshe. His job was to guarantee that the light of Torah emanating from Tzion - the Bais Hamikdash - would be

pure and true. Nothing else is as important. Therefore, his exclusive Mitzvah was not to teach Torah as symbolized by the lighting of the Menorah but to prepare the Torah so that what was taught was truly the pure word of G-d.

The Talmud in Kedushin discusses the position of the Kohanim as temple functionaries in relation to the rest of the Jews. For example, only a Kohain can bring the offerings on the Mizbeach; although, any Jew is allowed to slaughter the animal being offered.

The Talmud initially stated that the Kohanim serves as messengers of G-d to the people rather than serving as messengers of the people to G-d. The reason given is that a messenger should only be able to serve as a proxy for another in a matter that the "sender" himself is capable of doing. Otherwise, by what authority could one person appoint another to do something on his behalf when he cannot do it himself? The messenger should not be any more empowered than the "sender." If however the "sender" can do the thing he would like the messenger to accomplish, and it is just that he doesn't have the time etc. to do so, it makes sense that he should be able to grant the messenger the power of proxy to do so on his behalf.

In the case of the Temple service, non-Kohanim cannot bring the offering on the Mizbeach. Only Kohanim can do so. Therefore, how can Kohanim act as messengers of non-Kohanim? What authority accomplishes the proxy? Therefore, the Kohanim must be acting as messengers of G-d to the people rather than messengers of the people to G-d.

The Talmud concludes that Kohanim are actually messengers of the people rather than messengers of G-d. Regarding the argument against such a proxy, the Talmud states that the ability of Kohanim to facilitate the devotional needs of non-Kohanim is the whole purpose for Kohanim. The fact that non-Kohanim cannot act on their own behalf because they are forbidden to do so means that they have no other choice but to turn to Kohanim to facilitate their offerings.

The Kohanim, and specifically Aharon Hakohain, were intended to be role models to the rest of the nation as how Jews were supposed to be. Therefore, they occupied a very symbolic place in the life of the nation. They were never intended to be our proxies. They were intended to be our teachers. They were intended to raise us to the next level of our personal service with G-d. More often than not we cannot raise ourselves. It is usually accomplished with the direction and encouragement of teachers. The Kohanim are those symbolic others. They can do what we cannot. They can see the falsity of our lives and show us the way toward purity and truth.

The commentaries all remark on the unique word, "B'Haloscha" - "When you raise up the candles of the Menorah." It does not say, "When you light the candles of the Menorah." The word "raise up" is the true function of Torah leadership. As Rashi explains, "Your Job is to light the Menorah in such a way that the flame can then burn on its own." That means that the Kohanim, representing Torah leadership throughout the generations, must make sure that the cup is clean, the oil pure, and the wick the right length. They must make sure that the Torah is ready to be taught. It is their

responsibility to ensure that truth is taught and not falsehood. Only then can others do the job of actually lighting the candles.

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