

MOSHE WAS A KOHEN FOR SEVEN DAYS: G-D

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Shemini

Moshe was A Kohen for Seven Days: G-d's Justice is Precise

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Weekly Portion Torah Tapes: Tape #588, The Aveil and the Haircut. Good Shabbos!

There is an interesting Baal HaTurim at the beginning of Parshas Shmini. The first pasuk of the parsha reads, "Vayehi baYom haShmini" [And it was on the eighth day] "karah Moshe" [Moshe called] "to Aaron and his sons, and to the elders of Israel." [Vayikra 9:1] The Baal HaTurim (as he is known to do) ignores the punctuation (trop) and forms the phrase "haShmini kara Moshe". The Baal HaTurim notes that the Gematria [numerical value of these letters] equals "haya b'yom Rosh Chodesh Nisan" [this was on the first day of the month of Nisan]. This is in fact the case. The 8th day following the "Seven Days of Consecration" (which took place at the end of the month of Adar) was indeed the first of Nisan.

The Baal HaTurim then quotes a Medrash that Moshe (who served as the functioning High Priest during the Seven Days of Consecration) remarked, "Since I refused G-d's charge to me for seven days at the Burning Bush, I merited to be the High Priest for seven days."

On the face of, this Medrash begs for an explanation. Moshe's refusal to accept the mission that he was asked to undertake should count against him. Why does he think that he was rewarded for those seven days with seven days of being the Kohen Gadol? If he would have refused for two weeks, would we assume that he would have been the High Priest for two weeks? Obviously not!

Rav Simcha Zissel, in his Sefer Sam Derech, gives a very nice interpretation of this Medrash. Moshe Rabbeinu refused to take the Jews out of Egypt. Why did he do that? It was a function of his humility (he did not think he was worthy of the assignment) and his sensitivity (he did not want to offend his older brother). Thus, on the one hand, Moshe's refusal to accept the assignment stemmed from positive character traits. On the other hand, we do read in Parshas Shemos [4:14]: "And Hashem was angry with Moshe and He said 'Is there not Aaron your brother the Levite? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he will come forth to meet you and when he sees you he will be glad in his heart.'"

The Talmud [Zevachim 102a] wonders how Hashem's anger was manifest in this situation. Normally every time we find the expression "Vayichar Af Hashem" [the Anger of the L-rd was kindled], it is immediately followed by some type of punishment. However, punishment did not seem to be forthcoming here. Rav Shimon bar Yochai suggests that here too, we find punishment. In speaking to Moshe, G-d mentioned "Aaron your brother the Levite". Why was the description "the Levite" necessary? The Gemara answers that the original plan was that Aaron would remain a Levite the rest of his life and not become a Kohen. According to this original plan, the High Priesthood would have been entrusted to Moshe and his descendants. However, because of this "Divine Anger," the plan was changed such that Aaron and his sons became the Priests and Moshe and his family remained Levites.

This, then, is what Moshe meant when he said that because he refused for seven days, he got to be a Kohen for seven days: Moshe is saying that really he should have been a Kohen for all Eternity. However, since I refused for seven days (which was inappropriate, given G-d's insistence), I was penalized and only allowed to be the Kohen for seven days and no more. Given the fact that Moshe's refusal stemmed from noble character traits, he was rewarded by the fact that at least for 7 days he was a Kohen, but since he protested too much, it was for no more than 7 days. Hashem's Justice is very precise!

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