

WHY SHOULD WE BE DENIED?

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Behaaloscha

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah CDs on the weekly portion: CD #904 – Women and Birchas HaGomel. Good Shabbos!

Many of us are familiar with the first Rashi in the parsha, which explains the juxtaposition of the section dealing with the Princes (at the end of Parshas Nasso) with the section dealing with the lighting of the Menorah (at the beginning of Parshas Beha'aloscha). Rashi -- based on the Medrash Tanchuma -- says that when Aharon witnessed the participation of the Princes in the dedication of the Mishkan, he became depressed (chalsha da'ato). Aharon was disappointed that neither he nor his Tribe (Kohen / Levi) participated in the dedication. HaShem told Aharon, "By your life, your portion is greater than their portion -- for you are the one who will light the candles in the Mishkan."

Parshas BeShalach contains another, seemingly unrelated, incident. The Torah says that the Paschal sacrifice was brought on the fourteenth of Nissan, in its proper time. The Torah relates that there were certain people who were impure due to contact with the dead and were therefore unable to bring the Korban Pessach. They came before Moshe and Aharon and asked, "Why should we be deprived of the privilege of bringing the Korban Pessach?" Moshe consulted with the Almighty and was then directed to tell the people about the law of "Pessach Sheni" -- which is basically a "make up" opportunity for those who were tameh [impure] (or too far away) on Nissan 14. They were commanded to bring the "make up Korban" on Iyar 14, one month later.

At first glance, these two incidents seem to have nothing to do with each other. However, if we analyze them, we notice that both Aharon's disappointment at not participating in the dedication of the Mishkan and the complaint of the people who were "Tameh Mes" on the fourteenth of Nissan

Speak to the same theme involving disappointment due to being unable to participate in the bringing of a Korban. The theme is "Why should we be deprived?" (Lamah Neegarah?)

The people were tameh. The Halacha is that one who is tameh on the day the Paschal offering is brought may not bring it. There is not a stigma attached to the matter. The Torah exempts a person who is faced with circumstances beyond his control (Ownes Rachmana patray). What is a person supposed to do? He goes home without his Pessach Korban and that is it! However, they felt deprived. "Lamah Neegarah?" The Sifrei calls them "Bnei Adam Kesheirim, chareidim al haMitzvos" [fit and worthy individuals who tremble over the commandments].

These people were not content to rely on the Torah's exemption and save themselves some trouble. No. They felt that they were missing out on something precious and this pained them. This speaks to a wonderful characteristic that they had – their enthusiasm for doing Mitzvos and their inner urge to cling to the Almighty and His commandments. The fact that they had a legitimate excuse and could have gone home with a clean conscience did not satisfy them. They wanted to know "Why should we be denied?"

I recently read a story of a young Yeshiva student who was learning in Radin (in Poland). One Thursday night, he made a Mishmar [late night study session] and was on his way home from the Beis Medrash [study hall]. The city of Radin is cold in the winter. It was a snowy cold night. The young man was walking home late at night and saw another man walking up and down the street. At first, he was afraid – who is this person? When he came a little closer, he noticed that the person was the Chofetz Chaim (Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan). The Chofetz Chaim asked him "What are you doing up so late at night? It is cold. Go to sleep!" The boy returned to the host where he was staying, which happened to be the house of the sister of the Chofetz Chaim.

The Yeshiva student woke up Friday morning and told his host – "You know, last night I saw an amazing sight. It was two o'clock in the morning and your brother was running back and forth in the street. What was he doing there?" The sister told the young man, "This is already the third night in a row he is doing this. He has been trying to say the Blessing over the New Moon (Kiddush Levana) for the last three nights. There was not a clear night during those days of the Polish winter to enable him to see the moon."

The Chofetz Chaim was walking the streets at two o'clock in the morning on a cold snowy night. He told the student, "Do not be crazy. Go home already." but he kept walking the streets trying to catch a glimpse of the new moon. Our attitude – in the winter months – is "Nu, this month we will not be able to say Kiddush Levana. There is always next month." It is not our fault. It does not bother us in the slightest. The Chofetz Chaim's attitude was that of the Temei Mes who complained to Moshe. Why should we miss out?

This is the same attitude that Aharon has in this week's parsha. A Mishkan had to be erected. The twelve tribes each brought sacrifices. The tribe of Kohen / Levi was not part of these twelve tribes.

They were their own grouping. They were counted separately. In many respects, that the Kohanim and the Leviim were not part of the "12 Tribes". Therefore, it is natural that they should not be included in the Mishkan dedication ceremony conducted by the Princes of the 12 Tribes. Was that a reason to become depressed?

Winston Churchill once said that the measure of a man is what makes him angry. If a person becomes angry about small things, he is a small person. If only the big things in life upset a person, it shows that he is a bigger person. To paraphrase Churchill, the mark of a man is what depresses him. Aharon was depressed about spiritual matters. It depressed him when he could not participate in the dedication of the Mishkan.

The Almighty responded, "Yours is greater than theirs" – meaning the fact that this depresses you shows an even greater connection to Me than what their offerings showed. The fact that you have such a strong urge to participate in the dedication counts more than the offering of the choicest sacrifices. Therefore, you will have the job to light the Menorah.

The commentaries ask why specifically the lighting of the Menorah was Aharon's "consolation prize". The Ramban wonders why the consolation that the Almighty specifies to Aharon is not bringing the Ketores [incense] on the Inner Mizbayach [Altar]? Likewise, the Ramban wonders why the consolation was not that Aharon alone performed the special Yom Kippur Service? The Ramban famously says that the reference is not only to the kindling of the Menorah in the Mishkan but to the kindling of the Menorah in the Second Temple period by the Chashmonaim Priests – descendants of Aharon – an event which is commemorated eternally during the holiday of Chanukah.

The Sefer Shemen HaTov suggests that there is another message in the Menorah, which makes it a very appropriate consolation prize for Aharon. Aharon expressed his strong desire to participate, to be a part of the dedication. Chazal explain that Hashem does not really need the Menorah. The Medrash comments, "You are the Light of the world". Lighting the Menorah is merely a symbolic gesture of participation on our part. Hashem does not need our light, but it is an opportunity for us to light it anyway to provide Him with a bit of extra light symbolically.

We want to show our involvement and our enthusiasm to participate. That is why the Almighty consoled Aharon with the Menorah of all things. Aharon demonstrated his passion to participate in the Avodas Hashem. Therefore, the most appropriate job for him was the lighting of the Menorah, which does not functionally provide the Almighty with light, but which demonstrated our desire to show our devotion to Him and His Service.

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