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Behaalotecha 5783

Can We Afford A Praying Man As President?

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered June 19, 1976)

Can we afford a praying man as President of the United States of America?

First, let us turn to a significant item in this morning's Sidra. We read of the commandment to prepare and use the חצוצרות, the trumpets or clarions which were made of solid silver. According to tradition, the trumpets fashioned by Moses were sequestered immediately after his death. However, others were later made, and there are even pictures of the trumpets inscribed on the Arch of Titus, built to commemorate the destruction of the Second Temple at the hands of the Romans.

Two significant verses regarding the use of the trumpets read as follows: "*And when you go to war in your land against the adversary that oppresses you, and ye shall sound an alarm with the trumpets; and ye shall be remembered before the Lord your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies*" (Numbers 10:9). The next verse reads, "*Also in the day of your gladness (i.e., Shabbat), and in your appointed seasons (i.e., Festivals), and in your new moons, ותקעתם בחצוצרות, ye shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings...*" (Numbers 10:10)

The plain meaning of these verses is that there is a difference in the way the trumpets were sounded at the occasion of war and at the occasion of the holy days. During the former, it was a תרועה, the tremulous sound of nine short blasts, even as we have it on the Shofar of Rosh Hashanah. Hence, וְהִרְעַתֶּם. For the holy days, it was the single long blast, the תקיעה; hence ותקעתם בחצוצרות.

However, a completely different interpretation is offered by the Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Zevi Yehudah Berlin of Volozhin). He maintains that according to the Halakhah, each of these occasions required both a תקיעה and a תרועה, and hence there was no difference in the sounds of the

trumpets between these two occasions. Why, then, the difference in the verbs, the Bible using וְהִרְעַתֶּם in one case and ותקעתם in the other?

His answer is that ותקעתם refers to the actual blowing of the trumpet. וְהִרְעַתֶּם, however, refers not at all to a musical notation, but rather it means, "*ye shall be aroused,*" with specific reference to prayer! It refers to the tremor of the heart as man beseechingly turns to God in his anguish and uncertainty, asking for Divine succor. (So apparently, must one interpret Maimonides in the Laws of Taanit.) Hence, ותקעתם בחצוצרות means not that ye shall blow a תרועה on the trumpets, but you shall pray while the trumpets are sounded. Whereas on holy days, although one must pray anyway, the prayer is not part of the commandment of חצוצרות when offering the sacrifices. In times of war, crisis, or danger, there is a special commandment to pray along with the sounding of the clarions.

Now let us return to the question at hand: can we afford a praying man as president of this country? Let me begin by honestly and forthrightly disclaiming any partisan political interest in the question. Frankly, I do not yet know whom I will support, and if I did I would not share it with anyone, especially from the pulpit. But I am concerned here not with the political issues, but with great social and cultural questions of the first order.

I detect an uneasiness in the general circles in which we travel, and most especially in Jewish circles, at the religious expressions of Governor Carter. What is it really that is feared?

If it is our uncertainty because of his stand on specific issues, including and especially the State of Israel, then that is a legitimate concern. In that case, we must press him and other candidates for their views – although I am not yet convinced that any candidate's promises on Israel have any

enduring value after he is elected. But all this has nothing to do with his religious confession!

If the fear that his and his sister's evangelical leanings are a threat, that they are out to convert Jews, I consider that a bit naïve. Jews who come from Georgia do not report such missionary activities against them, nor are we aware of any special anti-Semitism by this candidate. We must be careful not to pillory a man because of his religious affiliation or commitment, and repeat the mistakes that this country made during the candidacies of Al Smith and Jack Kennedy.

I suspect the reason lies elsewhere, and it is not a pleasant thing to discuss. I suspect it lies in a dogmatic, doctrinaire secularism that is the dominant attitude in the Jewish community, and that cringes at the prospect that one who is, or seems, deeply religious will become president of this country, even if he is firmly committed to pluralism. (The charge that many Jewish intellectuals have an anti-Catholic bias is, to my mind, largely correct. I would extend that to say that the bias includes religiously committed Protestant fundamentalists as well. This is by no means racism, and it may well be a bias that has some historical justification. But it is a bias, and one that we ought to recognize and then do our best to rid ourselves of it.) I feel that it is this secularism which lies at the heart of our fear of Jimmy Carter. It is too much for the devotees of the cult of the secular to abide the symbolism of the highest office in the land being occupied not only by a president who prays, but by a praying president. Every president in memory has made the conventional gestures to religion, even to the point of having prayer meetings in the White House every Sunday. But here is a man who obviously means it – although no one is qualified to judge the degree of his sincerity – and it frightens those who conceive of the United States as fundamentally an established church of secularism which, nevertheless, tolerates private idiosyncrasies of religion.

Now, to me, a man's professed piety is not enough to qualify him as president of this country. I am much more concerned about his view of the economy, defence, foreign policy, etc. But certainly the fact that a man is religiously committed and pious does not disqualify him. To the question "can we afford a praying man as president," my answer is an unreserved, "yes!"

Moreover, all other things being equal – although they rarely are – I wonder if we could afford not to elect a praying man as president! After Watergate and the like,

it may not be enough to have a man in the White House who simply does not steal. We need a president whose probity is reinforced by spiritual dimensions. Something has got to be done to restore the integrity of the office of the presidency. The presidency, as we have heard time and again, is the most powerful office on earth. It cannot hurt to entrust the vast powers of this heady office to someone who knows that he is not God...

To an extent, I admit that I instinctively share the annoyance at the flaunting of piety in public by a politician. But on second thought, what are our alternatives today to this image of American leadership. Shall it be the extra-curricular activities of certain members of the House and the Senate? Americans can be more proud of Governor Carter's pleasure in praying than of Representative Hays paying for pleasure.

I am amused at the newspaper pundits and political observers and columnists who explicitly fault this congressman for spending government money on his own private erotic adventures, but hasten to add that their criticism is not directed at his actual deeds – as if the private lives of our leaders do not have symbolic and pedagogic consequences!

Now, I would be the last man to suggest that some kind of vice squad be set up to test the morals of elected officials. But they must know quite clearly that if any private misdeed becomes public, they are guilty of sullyng the great office they hold. If American youth is "turned off" politicians, it is because of their ethical failures during the Watergate period. And if American youth does not abide by the highest standards of sexual morality, at least a part of the blame must be placed on the absence of a proper model in government leadership as well as academic, business, ecclesiastical, and professional leadership.

We do need some historical perspective. This country is largely based upon the First Amendment to the Constitution. But this Amendment does not require that its elected representatives be non-religious. It forbade the establishment of religion, it did not establish secularism.

I remember several years ago, that that liberal and literate writer, Norman Cousins, published a book called *In God We Trust*. He pointed out that most of the leaders of this country, the Founding Fathers, were men of genuine religious conviction. The fact that they did not want an established church, does not mean that they in any way discouraged religious expression.

I am for the separation of church and state. I am not for the separation of religion and American citizens. For too long, the Jewish community's official attitude was almost obsessively focused on the so-called "wall of separation" between church and state. This "wall" has become the secular version of the *כותל מערבי*, the Western Wall, so cherished by religious Jews. So powerful has been this propaganda, that any critic – even a Rabbi – runs the risk of excommunication by the secularist elders and media pundits.

So let me say: even against Governor Carter, I am for more religious expression in the public life of this country, even in the public schools. I am not for denominational prayers. I am certainly not for coerced prayers in public schools. But I would like to see the kind of situation (and here is not the place for going into details on this subject) which would foster more respect for religious life and more religious expression in American life.

In an age of *צור הצורר אתכם*, when enemies and problems are never far off, we need *והרעתם*, and not only *ותקעתם*. We need not only the political clarion-call and the trumpeting of new programs, but also genuine prayer and awareness of a Higher Power.

Insofar as Jewish fears of conversion are concerned, I believe it is important to perceive what our major threats are. It is true that *שמד* or conversion by regular missionary groups are a problem for our community. But they are not the main danger. Our major threat does not come from the established Christian Churches, who themselves are worried to death by the erosion of their membership and influence. We face a greater danger from the exotic cults, from the Moons and the Maharajis and the Gurus and the Hari Krishnas, which suck in our young people who cluster around these contemporary idols in order to fill the voids in their lives, voids created by *de facto* secularism of the Jewish community. This secularism is not only an avowed one, but also often penetrates even Jewish homes which profess religious commitments. We may send a child to a day school, but if there is no religious experience in the home, he will never really be touched by a religious emotion and may well go astray after the lures of these exotic cults. And an even greater threat is – the simple disappearance of thousands of Jews, who do not even know that Judaism is more than a generalized political liberalism plus gefilte fish. Intermarriage, assimilation, demographic decadence – these are by far a greater jeopardy to our survival than the number of Jewish souls which may be

won over by Governor Carter's sister...

I return to the main theme: in times of danger we need *והרעתם*. Prayer is important for Jews. It is important for non-Jews, from a Jewish perspective; witness the approval by the Sages of the prayers of the non-Jews in the boat on which Jonah was fleeing from God. And it is important for us to encourage prayerfulness by non-Jews, because it sets the context and the tone for the whole of the community and country, and this will influence Jews as well.

Let me now return to the Netziv and conclude with a *devar torah*. I believe that the Netziv's interpretation, that *והרעתם* refers to prayer, can find support in a passage in Sifre.

One Tanna maintains that the commandment of *והרעתם* will be completely fulfilled only in the days before the advent of Messiah, during *מלחמת גוג ומגוג*, that final apocalyptic war which will herald the Redemption.

R. Akiba, however, is less inclined to such eschatological or legendary interpretations. He believes that the commandment is meant for contemporary times and in a very real sense. He therefore includes in *והרעתם* the following items: *ספינה*, *לילד*, *אשה מקשה לילד*, *מטורפת בים* -- crop failures, a woman experiencing difficult childbirth, and a ship coming to grief at sea. These occasions, all of them fraught with danger, are similar to *הצורר אתכם*, to being attacked by an enemy, and they require *בחצוצרות* *והרעתם*.

However, the truth is that I never heard of trumpets being sounded at such occasions. When in Jewish history did a farmer sound the clarion over rotting crops? And none of my colleagues who is a Jewish Chaplain in a hospital, ever blew a silver trumpet over a patient in an obstetric ward...

Hence, we must assume that the Netziv's interpretation is justified, and was anticipated by R. Akiba. He refers not to the sound of the trumpets, which is no longer applicable nowadays, after the destruction of the Temple, but to *והרעתם* as prayer. R. Akiba is authentically the voice of Judaism when he tells us that at all such occasions of emergency and crisis we must offer a prayer to the Almighty.

Life today, on this 200th birthday of the United States, is unfortunately described quite accurately by R. Akiba's illustrations.

We suffer from *שדפון וירקון*, from economic difficulties which, in their complexity, are probably unprecedented. We are in the category of *אשה מקשה לילד*: a new world is bloodily and painfully emerging from the womb of

the present, and we cannot tell whether our world will survive, or whether the new one will be healthy world or a monster... And we are much like a ספינה מטורפת בים: our society is largely a rudderless and leaderless ship, storm-tossed, uncertain and unsure.

At times of this sort, all of us – Jews and non-Jews, Americans and all mankind – need והרעתם, we need true prayer.

Let us not reject a man merely because he subscribes to

Leadership through Separation

Dr. Erica Brown

In Judaism, holiness is achieved through separation. We ritualize separations between holy and profane time, holy and profane foods and objects, and holy and profane behaviors. Separation, in this sense, requires conscious and deliberative choices to move away from or to move towards, to divide or to segment experiences through constant awareness and vigilance.

In our Torah reading for this week, Beha'alotekha, Moses is told to separate the Levites for special service: "You shall place the Levites in attendance upon Aaron and his sons and designate them as an elevation offering to God" (Num. 8:13). In their service to the priests who offer sacrifices, the Levites themselves become a sacrifice. Through this service, they elevate themselves as offerings. Sacrifices come in a lot of forms. Gifts on the altar are one form of service. People also sacrifice time, money, thought, and attention.

As the chapter continues, we see the special regard with which God holds the Levites:

Thus, you shall set the Levites apart from the Israelites, and the Levites shall be Mine. Thereafter the Levites shall be qualified for the service of the Tent of Meeting, once you have purified them and designated them as an elevation offering. For they are formally assigned to Me from among the Israelites: I have taken them for Myself in place of all the first issue of the womb... (Num. 8:14-16)

In his commentary Ha-emek Davar, Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (1816-1893) explains that Moses was to command the Levites "to distinguish and separate themselves in their conduct for God's sake." Moses could articulate the rules and even set them apart to fulfill their duties, but it was up to the Levites themselves to make an internal decision to see themselves as different and separate themselves from the ways of the world to sanctify

faith and because he prays. At this critical juncture in our national life, we need more spiritual presence, and perhaps out of this will grow a reaffirmation of our fundamental moral and ethical values.

For Jews the world over, for Israel, for all American, this is the way to the end of the verse: ונזכרתם לפני ה' אלקיכם, ונושעתם מאויביכם, *And you will be remembered before the Lord your God and you will be saved from your enemies.*

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themselves.

Rabbi Berlin continues this theme in his explication of these verse. The Levites were to direct all of their actions and thoughts to God and God's name, to be carriers, literally and figuratively, of the Mishkan and its holy objects. This physical role was established in the very first chapter of Bamidbar: "You shall put the Levites in charge of the Tabernacle of the Pact, all its furnishings, and everything that pertains to it: they shall carry the Tabernacle and all its furnishings, and they shall tend it; and they shall camp around the Tabernacle" (Num. 1:50). In this capacity, Ha-emek Davar stresses that the Levites behave with the utmost piety so that they are genuinely worthy of carrying the Divine Presence as they lifted and transported the portable Sanctuary.

God elevated the Levites so that they could elevate the boards, curtains, table, menorah and all the constituent parts of the Mishkan. This was not only a job that required great strength. It required immensity of spirit and righteousness. Let no Israelite feel that those who carried the representation of God in the world be anything less than outstanding ambassadors of holiness.

It is at this point, on Numbers 8:15, that Rabbi Berlin explains the challenge. The Levites had to be fastidious about keeping themselves pure of thought because those who are designated or designate themselves for special service run the risk of stumbling because of pride. "Anyone who sees himself as greater than another has an enlarged inclination" and in "getting close to holiness may bring impurity." In explaining how this played out in the prophetic book Malachi, Rabbi Berlin concludes that their greatness was the cause of their faltering. The Levites had the difficult job of separating themselves for God's

service while making sure that their service was always an expression of humility, especially towards others who do not enjoy their status.

Earlier, in Exodus, God spoke through Moses with words designed to help all the Israelites, a few months out of slavery, see their own leadership and capacity to serve a higher order through the commandments they were about to receive at Sinai: “You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6). In Rabbi Jonathan Sacks’ essay on “Servant Leadership” (Korach, Covenant & Conversation), he writes that, “In Judaism to lead is to serve. Those who serve do not lift themselves high. They lift other people high.” As this week’s Torah reading reminds us, all great leadership requires intentionality, humility, and impulse control, as if we, too, are carrying the holiest vessels of the sanctuary and moving them. That means elevating our speech, refraining from the gossip that is so often the currency of people in positions of power,

Growing

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z”l

The Ramban, in the letter that he wrote to his son toward the end of his life, presents a program for development of character. The best character trait of all, he tells his son, is that of anavah, or humility. In order to develop that trait, however, it is first necessary to remove the trait of anger from within oneself. That trait, he says, is a bad one, and causes man to sin. Once that negative trait is removed, he will be filled with humility, which leads to fear of God. In light of this teaching of the Ramban, we need to understand the events recorded at the end of this week’s pasha, which, at first blush, would seem to contradict what he wrote to his son.

The Torah tells us that the people complained to Moshe about the manna they were receiving, and asked for meat. Moshe turned to God and asked where he will get the meat to feed this large group of people. God tells him to tell the people to prepare to eat so much meat for the next thirty days that it will eventually come out of their noses. Moshe asks, “six hundred thousand foot soldiers are the people in whose midst I am, yet you say I shall give them meat and they shall eat for a month of days. Can sheep and cattle be slaughtered for them and suffice for them?” (Bamidbar 11:21-22). God, in response, told Moshe, “Is the hand of God too short? Now you will see if what I said shall

and giving people the benefit of the doubt.

In his book *Serve to Lead*, James Strock writes that the fundamental question for leaders in every situation is: “Who Am I Serving?” Once you can answer this question, he believe that, “... clarity and priorities can emerge, consistent with your calling, your deepest values. It is in answering that question that you can combine service and leadership into the unique masterpiece that combines your life and work. You resolve the question with the purity of your calling, expressed in the eloquence of action.”

There is clearly an onerousness in the notion of service, but the Lebanese-American poet Khalil Gibran (1883-1931), reminds us that there is also delight and pleasure in service, “I slept and I dreamed that life is all joy. I woke and I saw that life is all service. I served and I saw that service is joy.”

When, in a leadership role, did you have to work hard at righteousness?

happen to you or not” (Bamidbar 11:23). Rashi brings two opinions concerning the nature of Moshe’s remarks to God. According to the opinion of Rabbi Akiva, the remarks are to be interpreted literally, and, in actuality, what Moshe said on this occasion was worse than what he said at the incident of the waters of Meribah, and deserved the punishment of being excluded from entering Eretz Yisroel. However, since the remarks were made in private, God did not punish him for the remarks he made here, but, rather, for his behavior at the later incident. In both instances, we find Moshe Rabbeinu becoming enraged, and saying inappropriate things as a result of his anger. In fact, the Rambam, in his *Shemoneh Perokim*, writes that Moshe’s sin at the Mei Meribah was that he displayed anger when he wasn’t supposed to. According to Rabbi Akiva, Moshe’s remarks in connection with the people’s request for meat, which were also made out of anger, were even worse than his remarks at the Mei Meribah. Following this approach, the incidents recorded in the Torah following this one are very hard to understand.

The Torah tells us that Moshe, on God’s instructions, selected seventy men to serve as his assistants. God then bestowed His spirit upon these people, and they prophesied. After that, two more people, Eldad and

Medad, who remained in the camp, prophesied as well. Yehoshua, seeing this, felt it was an affront to Moshe, and told him to lock them in jail. Moshe answered, “Are you being jealous for my sake? Would that the entire people of God could be prophets, if God would but place His spirit upon them” (Bamidbar 11:29). Moshe here appears to be the quintessential anav, or humble person, not arrogating the power or prophecy to himself, but wishing that the entire people be afforded the ability to become prophets. According to the remarks of the Ramban to his son in his letter, it is hard to understand how Moshe, exactly after having spoken to God in anger, reached this level of humility.

Moreover, in the next incident, the last episode in the parsha, Miriam and Aharon speak in criticism of Moshe, and the Torah then remarks that Moshe was the most humble of all men on the face of the earth. According to Rabbeinu Nissim in his Dearashos HaRan, Moshe was actually present when his siblings spoke about him, and he didn't react, thus generating this comment about his character. Again, how, according to the Ramban, was

Moshe able to achieve this level of humility so soon after expressing the great degree of anger that he did in connection with the people's complaints? I believe that we can answer these questions based on a teaching of Reb Zadok HaKohein of Lublin in his work Tzidkas HaTzadik.

Reb Zadok writes that if a person sees that he is having an especially difficult time in controlling a certain trait or refraining from a certain kind of action, he should not view this as a sign of weakness on his part. Rather, he should view it as an indication from Heaven that it is precisely in this area that he has the greatest potential for growth. The difficulties he is experiencing are a means for him to apply greater effort in overcoming the challenge, and developing that trait in which he, in fact, has the greatest potential to grow. Based on this teaching, we can now understand that it was precisely after Moshe uttered the harshest words of his life out of anger with the situation facing him that he was able to then exercise control over this trait, and thereby apply himself to remove that negative trait, and develop the supreme trait of humility for which the Torah praised him.

If Only You Knew

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted from a shiur given at the Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim)

At the end of this week's Parsha, we have a story of Miryam telling Lashon ha-Ra about Moshe Rabeinu and her punishment with tzara'as. As Torah tells us later, in Parshas Ki Seitzei, *zachor es asher asa Hashem Elokecha le-Miryam ba-derech be-tzeis'chem mi-Mitzrayim*—remember what Hashem did to Miryam. And Ramban counts this as one of the six hundred and thirteen mitzvos—among the two hundred and forty-eight mitzvos asei. And even though he does not count this as a mitzvah, Rambam emphasizes in his Mishne Torah the severity of Lashon ha-Ra and that Hashem wants us always to remember Miryam. And the question is, why davka, of all examples of Lashon ha-Ra did Hashem single out the Lashon ha-Ra of Miryam? Why should we remember this incident more than any other? And both Rambam and the Ramban take the pshat approach and say that it's *be-derech kol shekein*. If Miryam, who was a big tzadekes, was punished for Lashon ha-Ra, how much more so should we be afraid of speaking Lashon ha-Ra. This was Miryam ha-Neviah, who really loved her brother and wasn't saying anything so bad—just a little negative. She just said he was like the other Neviim (and not a unique ba'al madreiga),

and she was a big tzadekes and an important person. And yet, Hashem punished even someone like her for saying Lashon ha-Ra—*kol shekein* we should be nizhar from Lashon ha-Ra. And that is certainly good mussar.

But I heard an additional explanation of why we davka have to remember Miryam. What happened with Miryam and Aharon? They had a great svara—it all made sense. What did they say? *Ha-rak ach be-Moshe diber Hashem? Halo gam banu diber!* Moshe is a Navi, and we are Neviim. And we were not poreish from marital relations. And their criticism was well founded because they knew how things work. They were *medame milsa le-milsa*, applied the usual rules, and concluded that Moshe was doing something wrong. And what happened? Hashem came himself and revealed the ultimate truth to them. And what did Hashem say? There is something you don't know. You think that you know what a Navi is? According to Rambam, there are two kinds of Neviim: everyone else, and one person—Moshe Rabeinu. Your opinion was founded on countless other examples, but you didn't know about a separate category that you had no reason to consider. Why would you think that one person belongs in a unique category? But as it

turns out that this is precisely the case. *Peh el peh adaber bo*. Rashi explains that Hashem told him to be *poreish min ha-isha*. Don't think he should follow the standard rules. He is an exception—a *gezeiras ha-kasuv*. Their criticism made sense according to all the logic they knew. But there was some factor that they could have never predicted. How were they supposed to know that Moshe had different rules than any other human being, which he received explicitly from Hashem? There was some factor that they could not have known or predicted—which changed the whole story and turned a problematic behavior into the highest form of Avodas Hashem. And perhaps that's why Torah tells us: *zachor es asher asa Hashem Elokecha le-Miryam*. When you reach a conclusion and are about

to tell Lashon ha-Ra about someone, remember the story of Miryam, when everything made sense to think that Moshe did something wrong, yet there was a factor for which they did not account. And if they had known, they would have reached the exact opposite conclusion. In life, there are always things we don't know. We are not aware what's behind the scenes. We never know all the factors. How many times have you thought something and then have been so surprised to discover that it was exactly the opposite? . . .and hopefully, you haven't said anything yet. Therefore, instead of jumping to conclusions, realize that there is often more than meets the eye, and the true story might be very different than it seems on the surface.

The Seven Traits of Character

Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The first Rashi in this parsha asks a strange question. Why does the mitzva of lighting the menorah immediately follow the story of the twelve nesi'im who brought korbanos for twelve days to inaugurate the Mishkan? Rashi explains that when Aharon saw the twelve days of dedication and sacrifices, he felt bad that he and his tribe were not included in this inaugural ceremony. Hashem said to Aharon, "I swear by your life that you have a greater merit than they do, because you light the menorah. The other nesi'im can't do that."

The Ramban asks an obvious question. Aharon and his children did all the avoda in the Beis Hamikdash. They brought daily korbanos on the outer mizbei'ach and the ketores on the inner mizbei'ach. Of all the parts of the avoda, why did Hashem pick that of lighting the menorah to console Aharon? Furthermore, why was Aharon upset when he wasn't included? He was going to be responsible for running the daily service of the Mishkan forever. The nesi'im had twelve days, and Aharon had forever. Also, he himself was involved in their sacrifices as the kohen who helped prepare those korbanos, so why did Aharon feel left out?

Seven Levels of Heart

The Shem Mishmuel discusses the two pillars of the human personality—the heart and the mind. People are a combination of emotion and intellect. Both are important, fundamental parts of our being that we must use in our service of Hashem. According to the Maharal, the numbers seven and eight have a certain significance.

Seven represents the seven levels of a person's heart: *chesed, gevura, tiferes, netzach, hod, yesod, and malchus*. These are the middos, the aspects of a person's character.

The first level of emotion is *chesed* (kindness), the trait of being a kind and concerned person. It represents how we understand Hashem. Hashem appears to us primarily as the source of kindness. He gives us our very lives. This is an amazing act of kindness, to give us life and to support our vital systems. The first midda a person is supposed to develop is *chesed*. He should concern himself with helping people, giving life to those who are less fortunate.

The second midda is *gevura*, which means strength. More than strength, it means courage and bravery. This world is filled with spiritual danger. A person must have courage and steadfastness to endure the tests and difficulties of this world.

The third midda is *rachamim*, compassion, also called *tiferes*. *Chesed* is open-ended. We do for others without thinking to control our *chesed*. *Rachamim* is similar to *chesed*, but it is balanced with thought. How should I help this person? Maybe I should limit my help so that the person can develop some independence. Open-ended, unlimited kindness is great, and sometimes necessary, but can be harmful in certain cases. *Rachamim* balances kindness with strength of character; it is the ability to say no in order to focus the kindness in good ways. This combination of *chesed* and *gevura* is a beautiful character trait, so it's called *tiferes*, beauty.

Netzach, the fourth midda, means eternity. When a

person makes a commitment, he or she must make it eternal. When a man and woman make the commitment of marriage, it is an eternal commitment. When we make a commitment to Hashem to keep His Torah and mitzvos, it is an eternal commitment. Even though a person lives only seventy or one hundred years, this does not mean that when he dies it is all over. People have an eternity about them. Our character has to reflect that. We are in this world developing and perfecting our character. This perfection will last forever, and when we go to the next world and into the times of Mashiach, our life will be with the character that we develop in our current state.

Hod means luster. The perfected human character has a luster to it. It's not just the actual things that we do with good character, but also the saintliness and spirituality we thereby produce. This spiritual halo develops around us when we do the right things and feel the right emotions. This is godliness that accompanies us.

Yesod is the sixth characteristic. *Yesod* means foundation. We are not just good in some places and cases, but in all situations. The idea is to be so good that our goodness and justness is fundamental to who we are. We see what is right and we do it no matter where we are or who we are with. These traits are not superficial things, but rather reach deep into our fundamental essence.

Malchus, the seventh level, is the concept of majesty. When we develop these characteristics, we become rulers over ourselves. Instead of being subject to our wild emotions, we control them and deliberately use them to serve Hashem. This is how we achieve majesty, which is the goal of being in this world. Hashem wants us to have dignity and rulership over ourselves. In this way, we also become kings over the whole world. These are the seven levels of good character, which Chassidus and Kabbala emphasize.

Aharon and the Nesi'im

These seven levels are of *lev*, emotion. Chassidus teaches that Aharon's main focus was on the heart. He didn't just focus on his own development, but also shared it with others. He helped others develop their emotional depth and wellbeing as well. Chazal refer to Aharon as *oheiv shalom v'rodeif shalom* (Avos 1:12). He loved and pursued peace. Peace means all seven levels of the character working in harmony. Aharon is the leader of the Jewish People in character development and *middos tovos*. Aharon wore the choshen with the twelve tribes inscribed on his heart. His heart is the heart of Israel, and he teaches the Jewish People how to be pure and good.

All the service in the Mishkan, which was primarily the responsibility of Aharon and his children, was focused on the *lev*, on loving Hashem. Even today, without a *Beis Hamikdash*, when we come to Jerusalem and to the Kotel, we have an emotional reaction. We feel a desire to come close to the place and to find Hashem there. This is an expression of the natural love people feel for God. The Mishkan is the place of people's love for God and God's love for Israel. This was represented by the *keruvim*, the two angelic figures on top of the aron hakodesh. Chazal say they were usually in a loving embrace, representing the love of Israel for God and the love of God for Israel.

The dedication of the *Beis Hamikdash* is called *yom simchas libo* (Ta'anis 26b). The day on which God's heart was happy was the day His dwelling on Earth was completed. It was an expression of the people's love for Hashem and of His love for them. Aharon was the high priest, the prime actor and doer in the service of the Mishkan. His service focused on love of Hashem and of Israel. Aharon's love for the Jews was part of his love for Hashem.

He spent so much time pursuing peace because he wanted every Jew to love every other Jew. After all, if God loves Israel so much, surely He wants Israel to love Israel. My beloved's beloved is my beloved as well. Aharon was the epitome of love of Hashem and Israel and having the balanced personality of Torah and middos.

The twelve nesi'im, princes, of Israel were probably chosen for their role because they were great scholars. Generally, the Torah prefers the political leadership of Israel to be connected to the highest intellectual levels. The Torah gives great political power to the Sanhedrin in Yerushalayim. The seventy-one leading scholars of Torah didn't just enact and interpret laws. They also declared war. They were responsible for appointing the king. They would even prosecute a king for betraying the trust of his office. Although you might think that scholars would be lost in their ivory tower of scholarship, Hashem says that the great Torah scholar is a great political leader. He will make good decision about who should be king. He will make the proper decision of when to go to war and when to desist.

The world of action must be connected to the world of Torah. We don't want a split in our society between the thinkers and the doers. Whatever we do as the nation of Israel should be done according to Torah. If the scholar knows the Torah best, then he has to know the practical side of life. The Sanhedrin is therefore the most powerful institution.

The twelve nesi'im of each tribe were probably the greatest Torah scholars of their tribes. The word *nasi* literally means elevated. He is elevated above the tribe to the highest political position. It also has a connection to *nesias rosh*, which means to appoint someone to a high position. It comes from the concept that this person's face will be recognized now that he holds an important position. People will be looking to him for leadership.

Nasi doesn't mean prince. It means a most elevated and prominent person, the person playing the leading role in a society. According to Chassidus, though, it also means his thinking, his brainpower. Aharon represents the *lev* of the people. The nesi'im represent the mind, the thought power of Israel.

The Avoda Character Development

Aharon's prime function was to perform the service in the Mishkan, to help people develop good character. The Shem Mishmuel says that development of character is indeed an avoda. Avoda as used in Torah refers to the sacrificial rites of the Mishkan. Avoda also means plain, hard physical work. The same word can mean the exalted service of God through sacrifices or menial labor, the lowly work of a slave. Working on one's personality is also an avoda. It is an exalted service of Hashem, and it is difficult work.

Aharon carried out the avoda of the Mishkan, and provided leadership for the Jewish people to develop good character, to find love for people in their hearts, in the seven levels of their personality. The Shem Mishmuel notes that every good trait is counterbalanced by a bad one. Being kind to people is wonderful, and it is opposed to the trait of selfishness. Being courageous is a positive trait, but cowardliness and fear of challenges is negative. Many people are shortsighted. There is a struggle within us between having a good personality and having a bad personality. It's difficult, it's an avoda, but this work of perfecting our personalities is a noble service of Hashem.

We find that Aharon did play a role in the inauguration of the Mishkan. During the first seven days of the inauguration of the Mishkan, Aharon and his children were required to be in the Mishkan the entire time the sacrifices were being brought. Moshe was busy with the actual service, and the twelve nesi'im were bringing their sacrifices each day.

These seven days represent the seven *middos tovos*. Aharon and his children stayed at the Mishkan to focus the holy energy of the Mishkan into people's personality. The place of service of God would be the place of man's perfection of his personality.

Rambam writes in Moreh Nevuchim that prophecy, the ultimate connection to God, begins with *middos tovos*. There was only one exception: Bilam, who prophesied despite his serious shortcomings. Aside from him, though, wicked people do not receive direct messages from Hashem. A navi must have a pure heart, and then Hashem might speak to the person. But someone whose heart is blemished with bad character cannot be a prophet.

Aharon was sitting in the Mishkan for seven days. In order for the Shechina to come to the Mishkan, people needed to have good character. This is the first seven days. According to Maharal, the number eight is beyond *middos*; it represents the mind. The three elements of the mind are chochma, bina, and da'as. These refer to knowledge, understanding, and being inspired to understand and know new things. *Da'as* is creativity. These top three levels correspond to the numbers eight, nine, and ten. On the eighth day, Aharon stopped sitting in the Mishkan, because the seven days of *lev* were completed. The princes of Israel continued through day twelve, because these elevated leaders of Israel represent the mind of Israel. They go past seven, into eight, and beyond.

The Connection between Mind and Heart

The Shem Mishmuel explains an important idea. Many of us suffer from the conflict between emotion and mind. Our minds often dictate one thing while our emotions want another. Ideally, the emotions and mind should work in harmony. If my mind wants me to do something because it makes sense, then my emotions should be galvanized to energize me. If my emotions are pushing me in a good direction, then my mind should be able to get on board with the decision. It should work this way, but it's not always so easy.

There is a pasuk that describes Aharon at the inauguration of the Mishkan: "*K'shemen hatov al harosh yoreid al hazakan zekan Aharon sheyoreid al pi middosav*. Like the good oil on the head that rolls down on the beard, the beard of Aharon, as it rolls down onto his clothing" (Tehillim 133:2). This pasuk may be speaking of the *shemen hamishcha*, the inauguration oil. It says it is placed on Aharon's head and rolls down his beard and onto his clothing. The word used here for clothing is *middos*, which we know also means character.

The Shem Mishmuel suggests a Chassidic interpretation of this pasuk. Olive oil, according to the Gemara (Brachos 57a) and Chassidus, represents wisdom. The Gemara considers it brain food (see Horiyos 13b). If you want to

sharpen your mind, you should eat olive oil.

The anointing oil is placed on the head of the kohen gadol and the king at the time of their respective appointments. This represents the hope that he will be granted Godly wisdom to make the right decisions. The verse says that this oil rolls off his head down his beard and onto his clothing, his middos. The Shem Mishmuel says this oil connects the mind and the heart, the intellect and the emotions.

The pasuk says that on the eighth day (of the inauguration), Moshe called Aharon, his children, and the elders of Israel (Vayikra 9:1). Why call this assembly? Moshe wanted to combine the intellectual and emotional leadership of the Jewish People. Aharon would take leadership at the level of emotion, while the elders and scholars would take leadership at the level of intellect. By bringing these two types of leaders together, Moshe was declaring that, in order for us to succeed, we need the leadership of kohanim and zekeinim to work together. Only then will this nation be holy. Only then will this Mishkan succeed in bringing the Shechina.

Aharon's Roles

This idea is important for all of us. We see that the first seven days were dedicated to *tikkun hamiddos*. Only on the eighth day did it move into fixing the mind, *tikun haseichel*. Chazal tell us, "*Derech erez kadmah laTorah*. Good character should precede learning Torah" (Vayikra Rabba 9:3). When we send our children to elementary school, our main goal should be to teach our children *derech erez*, how to be a Torah personality. Children are instinctively selfish. They grab and don't share, and sometimes they steal. We have to teach them to share. We have to teach them the good character of Israel. Only when they get older, as teenagers, do they begin to bloom on the intellectual level.

According to Kabbala, in the forty-nine days of the

The Age of Pessimism

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Ever since we were liberated from Mitzrayim, we had heard glowing reports about a land of Hashem, which flowed with milk and honey. Having arrived at the doorstep of this magical land, we secretly dispatched twelve agents to gather intel and to determine the best entry strategy.

Everything our spies witnessed in Eretz Yisrael

Omer, we prepare our character before we receive the intellectual gift of Torah on Shavuot. According to Chazal (Kiddushin 29b), a person should get married and only then will he grow in the higher levels of Talmud Torah. Marriage provides a workshop for perfection of middos. Only after this perfection of the middos can a person achieve intellectually in Torah. We have to develop and focus our personalities to make ourselves good and pure people, and then move on to the intellectual heights and exploration of the Torah.

The Shem Mishmuel now explains the Rashi with which we began. When Aharon saw the nesi'im bringing korbanos, he realized that they each had different roles. Their focus was on the mind, and his was on the heart of the Jew. He felt bad. He asked himself, "Why can't my responsibility include the development of the mind?" But Hashem told him not to feel bad because he will light the menorah. Ramban explains that this is the menorah of the Mishkan and of the holiday of Chanuka as well, which outlasted the Mishkan. Hashem told Aharon, "You are mistaken. It looks like you are only focusing on the heart, while they are focusing on the mind. But your children will achieve a focus on the mind as well. Right now, Moshe is the main mind of Bnei Yisrael, and there are nesi'im, too. From the tribe of Levi, we already have Moshe, who will be mind of the people. But in the future, Moshe will not be here. Then the kohanim will teach Torah as well, in addition to being paragons of good heart."

"*Sifsei kohen yishm'ru da'as, v'sorah yevakshu mipihu*. The lips of a kohen guard wisdom, and people will seek Torah from his mouth" (Malachi 2:7). Kohanim will also play the role of teacher of Torah in Israel. These nesi'im are only here for twelve days, but the kohanim will be permanent teachers of Torah. This is what Hashem told Aharon—you will be able to do both.

corroborated our expectations. Israel was not a typical land and everything about this country was outsized, beyond human imagination. The mammoth fruits were so colossal that it took eight men to carry one cluster of grapes. Fearsome giants roamed the land, capable of crushing any would-be trespassers under their boots. Evidently, these gigantic ogres weren't prepared to simply roll over and

hand us their country. Life seemed unforgiving in this ruthless land, which appeared to devour its inhabitants. Nothing is ever as easy as it looks on paper, and entering the land of Hashem was no different.

Shuddering at the reports of the returning meraglim, we stood at a historical crossroads. We could optimistically place our trust in a Hashem who had emancipated us from Egypt and had split the ocean. Alternatively, we could take the pessimistic route, assuming the worst and caving to our dark fears. Sadly, we chose the cynical approach, rebelled against Moshe, and rerouted Jewish history for forty years. It all depends on how you spin it.

Our descent into gloomy pessimism was caused by loss of faith- both in Hashem and in ourselves. A year before the expedition of the spies we had betrayed Hashem by bowing to the egl. Though He had forgiven us, perhaps there were limits to His divine clemency. Suffering the lingering trauma of our national sins, we harbored severe reservations about whether would assist us in battling these insurmountable giants.

More significant than losing faith in Hashem, we lost faith in ourselves. In the weeks before this reconnaissance mission the nation was roiled by several jarring controversies, such as our immature complaining about meat and our nostalgic pining for the creature comforts of Egypt. After these controversies subsided, the slandering of Moshe by his own two siblings further eroded confidence in his leadership. Our social fabric was quickly disintegrating and without confidence in our future, we sunk into dark pessimism, collapsing under the pressure of our fears.

Religious success depends upon delicately calibrating between doubt and optimism. Questioning ourselves and cross-examining our personal behavior enables honest self-introspection and religious improvement. By contrast, inflated self-confidence builds complacency and leads to religious apathy and stagnancy. Doubt preserves religious integrity.

Though doubt and uncertainty are vital for personal religious growth, pessimism and uncertainty about our collective future is religiously unhealthy. Essential to religious belief is an optimistic view of the future. Hashem established a historical covenant with our people guaranteeing our Jewish destiny. We may face temporary or even prolonged adversity, but Jewish destiny is inevitable. Excess pessimism about our future represents a deficiency

of faith in Hashem. Emunah isn't meant to glaze over hardship or propose naïve assumptions that "everything will be all right". However, emunah should provide a bedrock of optimism for our long-term prospects.

The Age of Pessimism

We are currently surrounded by a culture of pessimism. Several anti-humanistic trends are weakening our belief in the future of humanity and are causing widespread pessimism. The first tide of pessimism is based upon environmental concerns about the unlimited growth of technology and how it is causing irreparable damage to our planet. This bleak outlook about the future is infecting modern culture with pessimism, convincing us that tomorrow will undoubtedly be worse than today. Astonishingly, some even assert that it is pointless and selfish to bring children into a world which will soon go extinct. Panic about global destruction is causing widespread anticipatory anxiety and is providing a gloomy outlook about our future on this planet. We obviously must do better to conserve planetary resources, but without demoralizing doomsday prophecies and without falling into pessimism.

Ironically the second current of modern pessimism, often referred to as techno-pessimism, is being driven by overconfidence in human technological prowess. Artificial Intelligence will completely reshape our

world and, potentially will help us transcend many of our human limits. Fusing artificial intelligence to human beings may allow us to increase our intelligence and faculties. Additionally, we may be able to create sentient beings that can travel to parts of outer space which currently lie beyond the limits of human travel. Down the line we may be able to preserve our minds or create new forms of intelligence.

Ironically, this supremely optimistic view of the future cheapens the value of human life. If we create beings of superior intelligence what does that say about human identity and about our future? As robots become more human, humans become more robotized. Perhaps, Darwin was right and, as the world evolves to produce higher beings, humans will be the next in line to go extinct. Perhaps we are creating our own extinction.

Environmentalist alarms and swelled ambitions about enhanced reality, are combining to paint a bleak and pessimistic future for the creature of Hashem we call homo sapiens.

Israeli Pessimism

Israelis have their own set of reasons to be pessimistic. Over the past year, life in Israel hasn't always been rosy. We have endured terrible internal strife which has shattered our national unity and torn apart our social fabric. In the past, as difficult as life has been in Israel, we always took solace in national unity as the great equalizer. We may have encountered difficult periods, but at least we faced the challenges together, as one family. There is nothing like being at home, even when adversity strikes. However, over the past year, it feels as if our home itself is burning. To make matters worse, our enemies have sensed our social vulnerability and have begun rattling the sabers of war. Over the past year, in Israel, there is much to be pessimistic about.

This is precisely where faith sets in. Faith in Hashem, the dignity of Man, and the destiny of Jewish history. Humans are the masterpiece of Hashem's creation gifted with divine image and personal dignity. As part of His concern for human welfare He guaranteed that our planet will not

Greatness in Smallness

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

This week (in chutz la'Aretz), we read the sedra of Beha'aloscha. Many fascinating and important details and events are recorded in the Torah text for us, from the lighting of the menorah, to preparations for travel to Eretz Yisrael, to the laws of Pesach Sheni, the construction of the chatzotzros (the silver trumpets), Moshe's invitation to Yisro to join them on their historic journey... to the beginning of the end when the people complain, to Moshe's despair over the quarrelsome nation, to the shocking prophecy of Eldad and Meidad... to Miriam's about Moshe. It is a sedra filled with meaning, hope, despair, intrigue, passion, leadership, sin and Divine retribution.

The topic of Miriam's lashon harah about Moshe, spoken to Aharon, appears in the final perek of Beha'aloscha. וַתִּדְבֹר מִרְיָם וְאַהֲרֹן בְּמֹשֶׁה עַל אֲדוֹת הָאִשָּׁה הַכַּשִּׁיטִית אֲשֶׁר לָקַח כִּי וַתִּשָּׂא אֶת־הָאִשָּׁה הַכַּשִּׁיטִית לְקַח - *and Miriam and Aharon spoke against Moses regarding the Cushite woman he took, for he took a Cushite woman; They said, "Has Hashem spoken only to Moses? Hasn't He spoken to us too?" And Hashem heard;* וְהָאִישׁ מֹשֶׁה, עֲנֹן מְאֹד--מִכֹּל, הָאָדָם, אֲשֶׁר, עַל-פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה *and the man Moshe was more humble than any man upon the face of the earth*

collapse, and that humanity will not go extinct. The divine promise of global sustainability does not absolve us from the moral duty of environmental conservation, but it does provide a baseline of confidence about the future. We may develop advanced technology to create beings of higher intelligence of faculties, faculties but we alone possess a divinely endowed and immortal soul and we alone have been chosen by Hashem for moral experience and conscience.

As Jews we have been chosen not just for moral expectations but for historical covenant. For thousands of years, though dislocated from our homeland, we represented Hashem and His values. Our return to the land of Israel is an event of epic proportions and signals the beginning of the end of history. We know exactly how history concludes.

No one can determine exactly how the future will unfold, but faith belief stabilizes our confidence about the future and should help us repel the dark clouds of pessimism.

(Bamidbar 12:1-3). What was Moshe's reaction when faced with defamation and suspicion, lashon harah and possible motzi shem rah? Nothing. He was not angry, he did not take umbrage, there was no insult, no revenge and no hurt feelings. The Torah simply tells us that the man Moshe was more humble than any to walk the face of the earth. While most mortals would naturally feel hurt when slander is spoken about them, 'not so My servant Moshe, in all My house he is the most faithful' (12:7). Moshe rose above petty quarrels and strife to gain the most honorable title known to man: עֲבָדִי מֹשֶׁה, My servant, Moshe (see also Devarim 34:5 - וַיִּמָּת שָׁם מֹשֶׁה עֲבָדִי).

How can this humility be defined and explained? How do we understand that it is one of the highest accolades accorded to our greatest leader?

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z'l writes, "The idea that a leader's highest virtue is humility must have seemed absurd, almost self-contradictory, in the ancient world. Leaders were proud, magnificent, distinguished by their dress, appearance, and regal manner. They built temples in their own honour. They had triumphant inscriptions engraved for posterity. Their role was not to serve, but to

be served. Everyone else was expected to be humble, not they. Humility and majesty could not coexist.

“In Judaism, however, this entire configuration was overturned. Leaders were to serve, not to be served. Moshe’s highest accolade was to be called a servant of G-d. Only one other person, Yehoshua, his successor, earns this title in Tanach” (Essays on Ethics, p.229).

Fascinatingly, R’ Sacks points out that this disparity can be seen in the ancient symbols of ancient rulers and religions. “The architectural symbolism of the two great empires of the ancient world, the Mesopotamian ziggurat (Tower of Babel) and the pyramids of Egypt, visually represented a hierarchical society, broad at the base, narrow at the top. The Jewish symbol, the menorah (we must note that perhaps, not coincidentally, the menorah is the first topic in this week’s sedra), was the opposite, broad at the top, narrow at the base, as if to say that in Judaism, the leader serves the people, not vice versa. Moshe’s first response to G-d’s call at the burning bush was one of humility... It was precisely this humility that qualified him to lead... (Hence,) Moshe was undisturbed by the complaint of his own brother and sister, praying to G-d on Miriam’s behalf when she was punished with tzara’at...

“We now understand what humility is. It is not self-abasement... Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less. True humility means silencing the “I”. For genuinely humble people, like Moshe, it is G-d and others that matter, not me. As it was once said of a great religious leader, ‘He was a man who took G-d so seriously that he didn’t have to take himself seriously at all!’

“... Humility is also the greatest single source of strength, for if we do not think about the “I”, we cannot be injured by those who criticise or demean us. They are shooting at a target that no longer exists... Those who have humility are open to things greater than themselves while those who lack it are not. That is why those who lack it make you

feel small, while those who have it make you feel enlarged. Their humility inspires greatness in others” (Essays on Ethics, p.229-231).

Living a life of humility ultimately affects every aspect of one’s existence, from *bein adam la’Makom*, to *bein adam la’chavairo*, and extends especially to *bein adam la’atzmo*.

About his two-bedroom, sparsely furnished, barest-of-necessities apartment, located at Rechov Chazon Ish 5 in Bnei Brak, Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman zt”l remarked, “To us it is beautiful, especially compared to the house we lived in in Brisk, which had no indoor plumbing. It is also nicer than the small shack I slept in in Montreux, when I was teaching in the yeshiva there, and it is definitely a lot better than the barracks of the Schonburg work camp! For my wife and me, it really is a beautiful home. Its furnishings more than serve our purpose and are superior to the furnishings we both grew up with.” Furthermore, R’ Aharon Leib noted although the home was simple and barely furnished, all the furnishings inside were purchased with kosher money. There was not even the slightest question of *gezel*. “That, to me,” he said, “is a beautiful home.” R’ Aharon Leib told a grandson several times that he would be grateful to have as nice a house in Gan Eden as the one on Rechov Chazon Ish 5, as he is afraid he might end up with something worse, or that he won’t make it into Gan Eden at all! (Reb Aharon Leib, Artscroll, p.238).

One who lives a life of true *anivus* is happy with his portion from G-d (Avos 4:1), happy with those around him (Lev.19:17-18), and content with all that he has (Ex.20:14). He does not seek greatness or grandeur for himself, for before Hashem, we are all equal. And so, the most humble man to ever live was also the greatest to ever live. And the Torah he brought us, and taught us, is the blueprint for how we must all strive to live our lives, emulating the great model of Moshe Rabbeinu.

Raising Servants of Hashem

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

We read in Parshas Behaaloscha of the designation of the Leviyim for the role of serving in the Mishkan. The Torah explains (8:16-18) that the firstborns of Benei Yisrael were initially designated for this role, as they were spared by Hashem from the deadly plague that struck all the firstborn in Egypt. But then the firstborns

were replaced by the Leviyim, and the story of their formal consecration is told here in our parsha.

The conventional explanation for why the Leviyim were chosen to serve in place of the *bechorim* (firstborn) is because of *העגל הזהב*, the sin of the golden calf. Levi was the only one of the tribes that did not participate in the

worship of the calf, and so they were selected for the role of God's special servants, in place of the bechorim, who worshipped the עגל.

The Chizkuni, however, gives a different reason. He writes that if the bechorim had been assigned this role, then there would have been servants in the Mishkan whose fathers did not serve in this capacity. Quite obviously, not every bechor's father is a bechor. Therefore, there would be many servants in the Mishkan who were not raised and educated by somebody who had served. This privilege was thus given to a tribe, so that all those who served will have been raised by fathers who served. Every Levi's father is, of course, a Levi, and so the servants in the Mishkan will all have grown in the home of a Levi and shown an example of how Hashem's special servants are to conduct themselves.

The most important component of chinuch is teaching by personal example. Our children learn from our behavior far more than from our words. We cannot teach our children emuna if they see us anxious and worried instead of trusting in Hashem. We cannot teach our children about the importance of Torah learning if we do not make a point of setting aside time to learn. We cannot teach our children about the importance of tefila if they do not see us davening properly.

This past Shabbos (Shabbos Parshas Naso), we read as the haftara the story of Manoach and his wife, the parents of Shimshon (Shoftim 13). They were unable to have children for many years, until an angel appeared to Manoach's wife and informed her that she would soon

conceive and have a son, who was to be raised as a nazir. The angel proceeded to outline the special restrictions that the boy would need to observe throughout his life. The woman told her husband, Manoach, about this encounter, and Manoach prayed that the angel should appear once again. Sure enough, the angel reappeared, and Manoach asked מה יהיה משפט הנער – which laws his son would need to observe. The angel replied, מכל אשר אמרתי אל האשה תשמר – “Observe all that I said to the woman,” and proceeded to repeat the instructions that were given to Manoach's wife during the angel's initial revelation.

What was this all about? Why did Manoach want the angel to reappear? Did he not believe his wife?

Rav Shimon Schwab explained that Manoach wanted to know how he and his wife were to raise their son for his mission. They learned that he was destined for greatness – and so Manoach wanted the angel to explain to him how they should prepare him.

The angel replied, מכל אשר אמרתי אל האשה תשמר – which Rav Schwab understands to mean that Manoach was to himself abide by the restrictions to which their son would be bound. The only way for Manoach to train his son to be a nazir was for he himself to be a nazir. The most powerful education we provide for our children is the personal example that we set for them.

If we want to raise our children to be “Leviyim,” to be loyal servants of Hashem, then we must ourselves live as His faithful servants and show our children a model of sincere עבודת ה'.

The Blank Note

Rabbi Yehuda Mann

If I were asked until two years ago if I had heard of Rabbi Nathan Adler, I would immediately respond, “Yes, of course, the Rabbi of the Chatam Sofer!” However, during my visit to the United Synagogue offices in England, I learned about Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler, the Chief Rabbi of England between the years 1844 and 1890. I read his biography and discovered that Rabbi Adler was highly respected in England, received great honour even from representatives of the monarchy, and did tremendous work for the Jewish community in Britain.

Rabbi Adler was so esteemed that in the elections for the Chief Rabbinate of England, he surpassed his rivals and received the support of 121 out of 135 communities (each

community counted as one vote)! The second candidate, Rabbi Hirschfeld, received 12 votes, while the third candidate, “won” only 2 lonely votes.

But there are few in the Jewish world who are not familiar with the third candidate - Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch!

What a terrible defeat! How can one not be discouraged? To receive only 2 votes out of 135? Undoubtedly, others would have “taken the hint” and abandoned their aspirations, trying their luck in another field... But thank G-d, Rabbi Hirsch did not give up and continued to serve the Jewish community in Germany, where he saved his community from assimilation and

wrote books which still today adorn the Jewish bookshelf and serve as a source of ethics and inspiration for many generations. How did Rabbi Hirsch find the strength to continue and not give up despite the scorching failure?

It is written in our Torah portion that Eldad and Medad were prophesying in the camp, as it is written (Bamidbar 11:26): “But two men remained in the camp; the name of one was Eldad and the name of the other was Medad ... and they were among those recorded.”

What does “they were among those recorded” mean? Rashi explains that in order to determine the 70 elders, each tribe sent six representatives to be an elder, however there were 72 elders and he needed only 70. So he held a lottery; he took 70 notes and wrote on them “Elder” and two were left blank. Eldad and Medad were among those who got “Elder” in the lottery.

Rabbi Michael Taubes, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva University’s MTA high school and Rav of Zichron Mordechai in Teaneck, New Jersey, asked: Why did Moshe write the word ‘elder’ (zaken) 70 times? Wouldn’t it have been easier for Moshe to write on just two notes ‘No’ or ‘X’ instead of writing on 70 notes ‘Elder’? Why bother writing 70 notes when you could write just two?

Rabbi Taubes answers this question with a wonderful message: A Jew should understand that on his note, there is never a “No” or an “X” indicating failure. If a Jew fails to fulfill a desire or a dream that he hoped to fulfill, he should not fall into despair and think that on his note, the Creator (HaKadosh Baruch Hu) marked an “X” or “No”. His note indicates that he didn’t succeed, but it is a blank note. It is a note on which something else can be written. If not in this appointment, then in a subsequent one, and if not in this role, then perhaps in another role. But a Jew always has a role, always has a purpose, and he should not think that if he fails once, it necessarily means failure.

Therefore, Moshe marks seventy notes with the word “elder”, indicating that they indeed merited the appointment and role of being “elders.” But those who did not merit it have a blank note on which they can write their next role, their true purpose that suits them.

At times in our lives, we experience failures and consider giving up on our dreams. But we should not fall into despair, we should not think that we received a note with an “X”. We should know that the difficulty we face now only strengthens and prepares us for the next destination, for the role that truly suits us, for the special purpose that

the Creator has given us.

Maybe this was the reasoning of Rabbi Hirsch, when he suffered a devastating loss in England. He did not fall into despair, he did not think he was worthless. He knew very well that he had tremendous powers capable of doing great and mighty things. With these powers, he continued to serve as a Rabbi in Germany, and the rest, as they say, is history.