

And the Leviim shall be Mine. (3:12)

Chazal (*Midrash Rabbah* 1:10) refer to *Shevet Levi* as *neemanei aretz*, trusted ones of the land. Their stalwartness in not flinching when they had to take a position that was far from favorable earned them the approval and trust of Hashem. *Klal Yisrael*, however, did not make the correct choice when Moshe *Rabbeinu* called out *Mi l'Hashem elai*, "Who is for Hashem – to me!" This occurred during the *chet ha'eigel*, sin of the Golden Calf, when the *erev rav*, members of the mixed multitude, rebelled against Hashem. Moshe quelled the mutiny, and it became time to take decisive action against the mutineers. Ignoring what this would do to their popularity among the people, *Shevet Levi* took swords in hand and carried out Moshe's edict. *Klal Yisrael* shied away from responsibility. True, it was a very difficult task, but Moshe asked, and, when the need arises and the leader of the Jewish People asks, there is no room for indifference.

Let us now see how this indifference played itself out over time. *Shevet Levi* was selected to serve in the Sanctuary; *Klal Yisrael* was not. **Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl**, points out that it was this lack of *neemanus*, trusted devotion, to Hashem that deprived them of the lofty opportunity to serve Hashem in the *Bais Hamikdash*. Serving in the Sanctuary demands ultimate dedication, trust beyond question. There is no room for apathy, no place for indifference. While these deficiencies are indicative of an individual's character weaknesses, with regard to everyday endeavor and social interaction, they are especially demeaning with regard to *avodas HaKodesh*, service to Hashem, and all spiritual endeavors. The individual who acts with indifference demonstrates that he does not really care. He is dispassionate with regard to serving Hashem, indicating by his very inaction that serving Hashem has no significant role in his life. It is not that he is against it; he just does not care. Lack of feeling is worse than a negative feeling. One who has an active emotion is still alive. Hope exists that one day he might turn around and return to his spiritual roots. The one who is indifferent is dead – no pulse, no life. For him, little hope exists. He requires the gift of emotion, in order for him to be spiritually resuscitated.

As I write this a few days before *Pesach*, my thoughts go to the missing son, the one who does not even bother to show up at the *Seder*; or, perhaps, the one who is compelled by family and friends to attend, but has no feeling whatsoever concerning our nation's affliction or liberation. He simply does not care.

Two reasons might explain why one is missing from the *Seder*. He is so assimilated that he is clueless to our heritage, our history, and, of course, our destiny. For this son, we still hold a glimmer of hope. One day, he might meet someone who will reach out to him and bring him back. The pulse is there; it is his spiritual GPS that is deficient. It is the other son, however, who is estranged due to indifference, that presents the greatest danger to himself and to our people. When one has lost feeling concerning his heritage, he is on the road to spiritual extinction. He might quite possibly be a wonderful person, a man of integrity, an individual who is kind and virtuous, but he simply has no feelings toward Judaism. He is spiritually numb. He is not outraged by the anti-Semitism around him; spiritual apathy has become a way of life for him. He feels no

special kinship with his Jewish brothers and sisters. What happens to them has no bearing on his life.

One has only to peruse the titles of the books authored by responsible historians who depict the indifference and apathy of the western countries toward the European Jews during the Holocaust: *The Abandonment of the Jews; While Six Million Died; A Chronicle of American Apathy; The Terrible Secret*, and more. To quote a distinguished secular historian: "Americans were not cruel or evil or monstrous in the sense that Hitler was. They simply did not care. They abandoned their characteristic motivation, will, and creativity and failed to respond to history's most tragic episode in a human manner." Following the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, a writer for a small secular Jewish periodical (*Jewish Frontier*) wrote: "The Warsaw Ghetto had been liquidated; leaders of Polish Jewry are dead (many by their own hand), and the whole world-- which looks on passively-- in its own way, is dead, too."

Yes, one *Shevet* rose above indifference and took a stand during the tragic sin of the Golden Calf. *U'b'yom pakdi u'pakaditi Aleiheim chatasam*, "On the day that I make My account, I shall bring theirs in to account against them" (Shemos 32:34). Hashem will always take into account the sin of the Golden Calf, because it has not dissipated. Three thousand members of the mixed multitude sinned, but the rest of the nation stood by apathetic, indifferent to the *chillul Hashem*, desecration of Hashem's Name. We maintain a similar attitude today. Only it is called "politically correctness." We fear expressing our revulsion with the manner of observance, or lack thereof, which is evinced by some of our coreligionists. We are afraid of turning them off or losing their support. So, we continue in our "time-honored" tradition of acting indifferently to the moral and ethical turpitude that is rearing its ugly head. *U'byom pakdi u'pokadeti*.

A well-known dialogue took place between the saintly **Chafetz Chaim, zl**, and *Horav Shimon Schwab, zl*, when the latter had occasion to spend *Shabbos* in Radin, Poland. While discussing a passage in the *Talmud* concerning the position of *Kohanim* vis-à-vis the rest the nation (*Shluchei d'Rachamana o'shluchei didan* – are the *Kohanim* agents of Hashem, or agents of the people?), the *Chafetz Chaim* digressed momentarily and asked the young *rav*, "Are you a *Kohen*?" "No," *Rav Schwab* replied. "Perhaps you have heard that I am a *Kohen*," the *Chafetz Chaim* inquired. "Yes, I have heard," *Rav Schwab* whispered. "Perhaps you are a *Levi*?" "No."

"What a pity! *Moshiach* is coming, and the *Bais Hamikdash* will be rebuilt. If you are not a *Kohen*, you cannot enter the Sanctuary to perform the *avodah*, service.

"Do you know why? Because 3,000 years ago, at the incident of the Golden Calf, *dein zayde is nisht gelloeffen*, "Your grandfather did not run; when Moshe *Rabbeinu* called out, *Mi l'Hashem elai!* 'Whoever is with Hashem should come to me!' Now, take heart, when you hear the call, *Mi l'Hashem eilai* – come running!"

The call is constant. Every time evil rears its head, Hashem calls out to us, *Mi l'Hashem eilai!* Are

we prepared to heed His call?