

"Gather to Me seventy men from the elders of Yisrael, whom you know to be the elders of the people and their officers." (11:16)

In *Sanhedrin 29*, *Chazal* state that these men constituted the *Sanhedrin*. This group of elders served as the Egyptian taskmasters over the Jews. They were selected for this prestigious position because of their unparalleled devotion to *Bnei Yisrael* -- to the point of self-sacrifice. When Pharaoh insisted that they punish *Bnei Yisrael*, these foremen opted to be beaten mercilessly themselves, rather than inflict punishment upon their brethren. *Chazal* derive from the emphasis upon this character trait that one who risks his health and welfare on behalf of *Klal Yisrael* merits to achieve prominence and Divine inspiration.

When Pharaoh selected these individuals to serve as foremen over his Jewish slaves, it was due to their physical prowess, not their pre-eminence in *Torah* and *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven. Only after they jeopardized their lives for the sake of *Klal Yisrael* did they become worthy of their noble distinction. Yet, the esteem and unique spiritual gifts they achieved were not bequeathed to their descendants. Why is this?

When *Shevet Levi* came forward and demonstrated singular allegiance to Hashem, they merited to perform the *avodah* in the *Bais Ha'Mikdash* and the various distinctions afforded to the *Leviim* for themselves and all their descendants in the generations to come. What distinguished their *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, so that the reward carried over to their progeny, while the *shotrim* in Egypt who suffered physically for *Klal Yisrael* only earned a personal reward?

Horav Chizkiyahu Cohen, z.l., explains that the reward is commensurate with the goal of the act of *mesiras nefesh*. The *shotrim* in Egypt endangered themselves on behalf of their brethren's physical well-being. Consequently, they were rewarded with personal distinction. The *Leviim*, on the other hand, sacrificed themselves for the maintenance of the spiritual fiber of *Klal Yisrael*. For imperiling themselves for the eternal continuation of Hashem's *Torah* and *mitzvos*, they were rewarded with eternal distinctions. It is not sufficient to give of oneself to sustain someone physically. One must focus upon nurturing the spiritual development of the Jewish people.

One who devotes his life so that other Jews can study *Torah* and observe *mitzvos* will surely merit that his descendants will have spiritual endurance. Indeed, it is in the area upon which one places his prime focus that Hashem shows His appreciation and reward. If we are to ensure that our own children continue their spiritual growth, we must see to it that all Jewish children are availed the opportunity for spiritual advancement.