

"When you kindle the lamps." (8:2)

The *parsha* begins with the section which deals with the maintenance of the *menorah*. It follows immediately after the conclusion of *Parashas Naso*, which is concerned with the dedication of the *mizbei'ach*. *Chazal* address the juxtaposition of these two topics. They remark that upon witnessing the ceremonial activities and involvement of the *nesiim* in the altar's dedication, Aharon *Ha'Kohen* became pained by his own and his *shevet's* exclusion from them. Hashem responded to this concern by emphasizing Aharon's unique opportunity to prepare and kindle the *menorah*.

The *Ramban* notes the difficulty inherent in this statement. Aharon had the responsibility for other acts of service, no less important than the maintenance of the *menorah*, such as offering the *korbanos*. Why is the *menorah* service singled out as Aharon's compensation for his lack of involvement in the dedication of the *mizbei'ach*? Indeed, *Chazal* allude to this when they add that although Aharon was also granted the distinction of offering the *korbanos* on the *mizbe'ach*, this privilege extended only as long as the *Bais Ha'Mikdash* was in existence. Even though the *menorah* was no longer kindled after the destruction of the *Bais Ha'Mikdash*, its spirit lasts forever. This interpretation still begs elucidation, for, does not the spirit of the sacrifices also continue to be with us?

In examining the text of the *Midrash*, *Horav Shlomo Breuer, z.l.*, notes the emphasis *Chazal* place upon the active role the *nesiim* played in the dedication of the altar as the source of Aharon's distress. Truly there is no other place in the *Torah* where such remarkable honor is conferred upon the *nesiim*. What was unique about their material gifts that distinguished them? Material wealth is a wonderful gift from Hashem -- if one knows how to appreciate and perform his obligations resulting from this gift. One should engender within himself an understanding that material gifts are to be consecrated by dedicating them toward the greater spiritual good and in service to the Almighty.

The *nesiim's* approach to Hashem's altar was one of subservience, solemnly dedicating to place all of their possessions in the service of Hashem. Each *nasi* uniquely understood his own individual responsibilities and how to appropriate his material wealth toward the successful realization of his G-d-given mandate. In reading the chapter about the *nesiim's* gifts, we should be conscious of how great is of the unique Jewish deed, which assumes pre-eminence when the material is consecrated toward its higher spiritual goal.

Specifically in this manner, a display of "Jewish money" was dedicated toward the inauguration of the *mizbei'ach*. The mundane and material was sublimated and hallowed, so that sanctity was bestowed upon the altar. Only one tribe was not to contribute personally to this lofty endeavor. One tribe would remain a spectator, while the other tribes would be active participants -- because the members of this tribe were poor, receiving their sustenance from the members of the other tribes. *Shevet Levi* with its prince, Aharon *Ha'Kohen*, had but one earthly possession -- the *Torah*. Being privy to the spectacular display of material wealth being consecrated *l'shem shomayim*, for the sake of Heaven, brought to Aharon's mind the stark realization that he was excluded from such an

endeavor, because of his lack of material wealth. He was apparently not resentful, however, because of his lack of material possessions.

Hashem comforted Aharon with the words *ovkan vkusd lka*, "Your share is greater than theirs." The light of the *menorah*, which is a metaphor for the light of the *Torah*, endures. It outlasts the *Bais Ha'Mikdash*, its appurtenances and religious service. The precious good to which you, Aharon, devote yourself will ultimately be the only everlasting possession of *Klal Yisrael*. We did not always have material wealth with which to pay homage to Hashem. Exiled from place to place, living as beggars, we suffered pain and deprivation, but we always have had the eternal *Torah* which imbued us with a sense of pride and dignity.

The *Torah* is our sole remaining treasure and only real possession. This precious gift, its maintenance, and continued dissemination are entrusted to Aharon, his *shevet* and their surrogates, *bnei Torah* who devote their lives to its study and institutions. The constant awareness of this trust and privilege should be the prime source of satisfaction for Aharon and his descendants. They have been empowered with the extra-ordinary opportunity of disseminating the treasure of the Jewish people, its heritage and tradition. This task should imbue each of them with a feeling of fulfillment, a sense of accomplishment, and, above all, an appreciation of their mission in life. This sense of achievement is reflected in the pride experienced with the successful observance of the *mitzvah* of *Torah* study and the acceptance of the responsibility for disseminating it to others. As in any endeavor, success breeds pride, and pride breeds success!