

## And they were counted as Hashem commanded Moshe. (4:49)

*Ramban* observes these three families of *Leviim* were Divinely designated, each family for its individual service. Furthermore, *Ramban* asserts that no *Levi* was permitted to go beyond his specific service. He was not to exchange his service or assist in an area for which he was not designated. Once Rabbi Yehoshua *ben* Chanania wanted to assist Rabbi Yochanan *ben* Gudgoda with the doors, and he was rebuked. The latter said to him, "Return! For you are already liable for death, since I am from those who attend to the gates, and you are of those who sing in the *Bais Hamikdash*!"

**Horav Zaidel Epstein, zl**, derives from the *Ramban* that one must take great pains to recognize and acknowledge his proper position and place. If he goes beyond his designated perimeter, he is liable to incur punishment – regardless of his noble and lofty intentions. If one does not "belong," he should stay away. Imagine a *Levi* who was blessed with the gift of an amazing voice. When he sings, he is able to move and inspire large groups of people; yet, he was designated to be among those *Leviim* who attended to the gates of the *Bais Hamikdash*. If he leaves his post and joins the *Leviim* choir, his beautiful voice notwithstanding, he has still crossed the line, such that he becomes *chayav missah*, liable for the death punishment.

Great people know when and where they belong, and when and where they do not belong. They might want to join, cross the line, not stand on tradition, waiting to be asked, but they do not cross the line, specifically because they are great. Indeed, it is this ability to know "when and where" that often defines one's greatness. Everyone wants to be relevant; everyone wants to make a difference, to help, to give of themselves. Nonetheless, he does not necessarily realize that there is a time and a place. His time and place has not yet arrived.

The *Mishnah* in *Meseches Succah* (51a) portrays the extraordinary joy experienced by those who took part in the *simchas Bais HaShoeivah*, Water Drawing ceremony, on *Succos* in the *Bais HaMikdash*. The *Mishnah* teaches that *chassidim v'anshei maaseh*, pious individuals, men of stature and action, would dance while the rest of *Klal Yisrael* served as spectators, watching the proceedings and imbibing the deep spiritual inspiration that was manifest. Who determined who should dance? Who decided who was worthy of dancing in the middle? **Horav Gedalyah Eisman, zl**, derives from the fact that the *Mishnah* does not address these issues that it was not necessary to designate who should dance and who should watch. Why? Everyone knew where he belonged. They were spiritually astute, understanding that dancing was not for everyone. Only the most virtuous, pious, the distinguished doers of the community belonged in the middle. Those who belonged, knew it. Those who did not belong – also knew their place.

Many go through life assuming vocations at which they are successful, yet feel unfulfilled, sensing a deeply rooted desire to achieve greater relevance in society. While this may be a noble

aspiration, it might run counter to who they are, their personalities and talents. A well-known secular writer once said, "We all end up doing the thing that we are second best at." This is a sad commentary on life. One should definitely continue to aspire, to try, to achieve, but never lose sight of the fact that this position might be the one for which he was Divinely ordained. At times, we "end up" in a place which we feel stifles our creativity; does not enable us to reach greater masses of people; does not permit for our true talents to mature and achieve their potential. We forget that each individual Jew whom we reach is worth a world. Every *neshamah*, soul, whom we have touched and brought closer to its Heavenly Source is unimaginable success. It may not be what we want, but, if it is what Hashem wants, that is all that counts.

There are no coincidences in Jewish life; no one should ever feel that he is displaced or lost. A Jew is never lost. He is where he is, because it is Hashem's plan. The sooner he stops complaining about his lot and begins to make the best and the most of it, the sooner he will achieve Hashem's Divine plan.

Many of us have made decisions which have directly influenced the course of our lives. Some have made decisions, which, at the time, were viewed as positive, only to discover, years later, that the results were far from positive. Others have made decisions which were derided and scorned by some of our closest friends and relatives, only to discover years later that these seemingly negative decisions were actually life-altering, positive choices. We should never forget the role Hashem plays in "our" decisions.

I write this a few days before *Pesach* – the festival in which distinguishing between *chometz* and *matzah* is so prominent. One second beyond the normal eighteen minutes for the dough to begin rising marks the difference between *matzah* and *chometz*. That is all it takes – one second. Life is about those "one second," "one time," decisions. We say, "What difference does it make?" "It's only one time," "You only live once." That one decision can, and often does, spell the difference between spiritual success and its counterpart. Indeed, generations may hinge on that one decision.

I have the picture of my paternal grandfather, the individual for whom I am partially named, hanging prominently in my house. Although I never met him, I have made certain that my children and grandchildren never forget the impact his decision to remain in Europe during the immigration of the 1920's had on our family. My great-grandparents, together with their three daughters, emigrated to America. Two of them settled in Chicago with their parents, and one went to Memphis. My grandfather, their brother, chose to remain in Europe. At the time, he was considered a fool, especially with the rising anti-Semitism emanating from Berlin.

Understandably, my father's cousins did not survive the effect of the spiritual wasteland of America. Their children fared even worse. Their grandchildren are, from a Jewish perspective, non-existent. My father, who stood by his father, suffered through the Holocaust. Together with my mother, they lost just about their entire families, including their own three children. They survived the war and rebuilt their lives, raising three children whose families have grown through the help of

Hashem into an incredible living legacy, because of my grandfather's decision to remain in Europe. This year was my father's fiftieth *yahrtzeit*. I had occasion to be in Chicago at the cemetery, accompanied by my sons, a daughter and two of my grandsons. I went over to the graves of my great-grandparents who made the decision to come to America almost a century ago. I stood there with their great-great-grandchildren and recited *Tehillim*, proud that we could be doing this – only because their son made the fateful decision to remain in Europe. Sadly, we and the other members of our families are the only ones who visit their graves. My remaining relatives are products of those who also made a decision – one, thank G-d – which enabled them to survive physically, but nevertheless resulted in their abandoning our sacred heritage. Two different decisions which impacted generations.