

And the ability to instruct he installed in his heart, he and Ahaliav ben Achisamach, of the tribe of Dan. (35:34)

Rashi notes that Ahaliav *ben Achisamach* was *min ha'yerudin she'b'shevatim*, one of the lowliest of the tribes, "Yet Hashem equates him to Betzalel regarding the works of the *Mishkan*, and Betzalel was from *Shevet Yehudah*, which was from the greatest of tribes." The lesson to be derived is quite simple: when it comes to building the *Bais Hamikdash*, all Jews are equal. *Yichus*, lineage, regardless of its illustrious origins, does not play a role in granting a person a position of distinction.

Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita, explains that all of the various masks that exist in the world, masks that often conceal one's true essence, even the mask associated with *yichus d'kedushah*, holy and illustrious lineage, only reach up to the actual point of *kedushah*. The source of holiness, the point from which holiness emanates, nullifies and reveals that which is under the masks. There only one entity exists: Hashem; and, before Hashem, we are all equal. Thus, when one came close to the *makom haMikdash*, the place of *kedushah*, the *Bais Hamikdash*, the individual must achieve total self-abnegation, as if he is absolutely nothing. In the presence of the Almighty, masks have no place. The masks are for us – simple people who often act clueless with regard to the *emes*, truth, of our existence. In other words, when we confront the reality of Hashem, we must "get real" and put an end to the sham that often, by our choice, controls our lives.

Rav Rabinowitz cites from the *Siddur Rav Yaakov Emdin*, in the *Seder Erev Pesach*, who quotes from the *Sefer Shevet Yehudah*, testimony from a Roman officer who witnessed Yerushalayim in its beauty, when the *Bais Hamikdash* stood and the *avodah*, service, was an ongoing reality. In describing the service of the slaughter of the *Korban Pesach*, he says, "By decree of the Jewish people, when they would go out to prepare this service, no man would come close, or push forward (each person in his place), regardless of the individual's stature, even if (it meant that) *Shlomo Hamelech* or *David Hamelech* was relegated to stand in the back of the line. I asked the *Kohanim*, Priests, "Is this appropriate? (That those who descended from distinguished lineage or who were prominent personages should have to wait behind those whose pedigree was not of their exalted caliber?)." They replied, "There is no grandeur before Hashem. At this point of the service, when we all stand before the Almighty, all Jews are equal."

Rav Gamliel underscores this thought. While it is true that distinction is made in deference to a person's age and scholarship, this is only for the purpose of external *kavod*, honor. After all is said and done, however, we must realize that when it comes to Hashem we are all equal – regardless of the individual's pedigree and self-generated honorariums.

Jewish literature is replete with the notion that all Jews-- regardless of pedigree, financial status, scholarship and acumen-- are equal before Hashem. Regrettably, this idea has a tendency to slip our mind. While it is, of course, understandable, it does not have to be so glaringly obvious. Adults are used to it; children, however, have greater difficulty in processing the irreverence.

Many of us have paid our dues and raised children of whom we are very proud. This does not, however, grant us license to blast in everyone's face – especially those who have recently become Torah-observant, and whose children have not bought into the package. They, too, would like to brag about something, but, sadly, it is too late for their children. I recently was reviewing *Gemorah* with my grandson over the phone. I was sitting in the corner of the *shul* prior to a *shiur*. A young man who is a wonderful *ben Torah*, having studied for years after becoming *frum*, said to me, "I guess my children will never know what it means to learn with their *zayde*." I replied, "Neither did I, nor did most of my generation. Hitler, *yemach shemo*, saw to that." I am not sure if this ameliorated his problem, but it was a rejoinder that conveyed a simple message: we are all equal; we all have our issues with which to contend.

In relating to the child who was less fortunate than his peers, **Horav Aryeh Levine, zl**, made his special mark. The *Tzaddik* of Yerushalayim was known for his empathy to all Jews, of all backgrounds and religious beliefs. It was in his role as *Menahel* of *Yeshivas Eitz Chaim* that his care for the young child who was less fortunate was manifest. There was an old established custom at the school that whenever a student reached *bar-mitzvah* age, his classmates would all share in purchasing a *sefer* for him. Each boy gave his portion, after which the *sefer* was given to *Rav Aryeh* for his personal words of inscription in it, and then given to the *bar-mitzvah* boy. Without *Rav Aryeh's* good wishes, the gift was hollow and empty.

One boy was poorer than the others. His parents lived in abject poverty. As such, there was no way that they could contribute to the gifts that the students gave one another. Sadly, children do not understand what parents go through – especially when it is someone else's parents. Therefore, when this boy's *bar-mitzvah* approached, no one in the class wanted to contribute for his *bar-mitzvah sefer*. They felt that he deserved to receive exactly what he had given: nothing.

Rav Aryeh asked the *rebbe* of the class why no one had brought him a *sefer* to inscribe for this boy. They *rebbe* had no alternative but to tell him the truth: no one wanted to give him anything.

Rav Aryeh asked the *rebbe*, "Please go to my house and ask my wife to give you the *Chumashim* that are on top of the bookcase." The *rebbe* quickly went to *Rav Aryeh's* house and brought the *sefarim*. *Rav Aryeh* took one look and emitted a small groan, "I did not mean these *Chumashim*. I meant the new ones which were given to my son as a present. He never used them, and now that he is grown up and out of the house, he will never really need them. Please bring those. I do not want to give this child a used set of *Chumashim*."

The *rebbe* returned, and *Rav Aryeh* wrote a beautiful inscription. "Who knows," he said, "what kind of anguish the boy would have experienced if he saw his classmates coming empty handed to his *bar-mitzvah*. He would have been devastated! This is murder. Is it his fault that his parents are poor and, as a result, he cannot share in buying presents for the other boys? If there is any way to save a child from disaster, we must do everything that we can!" He concluded his dedication in the name of all of the students in the class.