

The one who said of his father and mother, “I have not seen/favored him”; his brothers he did not recognize and his children he did not know.” (33:9)

As Moshe *Rabbeinu* blesses *Shevet Levi*, he details their qualities and the perfection of their souls, which they exhibited while standing up for the Glory of Hashem and His Torah. They withstood enormous challenges to their spiritual persona and emerged better people, to the point that their individual personal lives had no meaning to them. They lived for Hashem. When Moshe stood in the midst of the Jewish camp following the tragic sin of the Golden Calf, he called out, *Mi l'Hashem eila!* “Who is for Hashem should come forward and stand by me!” It was the tribe of *Levi* that surged forward and answered the call. At Moshe’s order, they raised their swords and slew the idolaters. Even if they were close family, if they participated in *cheit ha’eigel*, they had become Hashem’s enemies. This tribe truly demonstrated unprecedented commitment.

Therefore, it is strange that when we read *Bircas Moshe*, our quintessential leader’s blessing, it seems surprising that to the praises he bestowed on these spiritual giants, Moshe adds: *Ki shamru imrasecha u’Brischa yintzoru*, “For they observed Your word and Your covenant they preserved” (conclusion of 33:9). These words are anti-climactic. **Every** Jew is obligated to observe Hashem’s Word and preserve His covenant. What did *Shevet Levi* do that was so unusual? It is like saying that the spiritual giant – the greatest, most eminent scholar – of the generation observes *Shabbos*. Is this all there is to say about him/them?

Horav Avraham Zelmans, zl, Rosh Yeshivah in Novarodok, derives from here an all-important lesson concerning *avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty. Regardless of one’s spiritual stature – even if he is the *gadol ha’dor*, preeminent leader of the generation, someone who has the ability to catalyze great and mighty achievements, and withstand the greatest challenges – **even he** must concern himself with what may appear to be an insignificant *mitzvah*, a simple spiritual endeavor. He may not say, “I will do bigger and better things.” He is obliged in the most basic/simple, as well as the most sublime. One may not say, “I do not have the time for *davening* in the morning; I am busy all night with important communal activities, I am writing my *shiurim*, lectures, etc.”

There are individuals whose lives are devoted to the basic *mitzvos* – *shul*, a little learning, *tzedakah*, *Shabbos*, etc. They do not get involved in the larger communal issues. They do not protest, give *mussar*, “stick out their necks” to take on those who would usurp the Torah-way. On the other hand, there are those gifted individuals whose innate talent and personality render them prime candidates for communal leadership. They are always in the thick of things, in middle of the fray of activity. They can be called upon 24/7 to respond if someone is in distress. However, when it comes to the basics – such as timely *davening*, attendance and participation, learning a daily minimum, helping someone with a mundane matter – they are suddenly deficient.

The Torah is teaching us that an *adam ha’s haleim*, complete man, does it **all**. Only one who has

successfully adhered to the criteria of, “For they observed Your word and Your Covenant they preserved,” can go on to be among those who answer the call of “*Mi l’Hashem eilai.*” One does not happen without the other.