

## **The Nesiim/Princes brought the Shoham stones and the stones for the settings for the Ephod and the Choshen. (35:27)**

Chizkuni teaches that when the Nesiim left Egypt, they chose to include precious stones among their requests of the Egyptians. They knew that there would be a Sanctuary and that the Kohanim would administer the service under the leadership of a Kohen Gadol. They were aware that the Kohen Gadol would wear special Priestly Vestments, among which would be the Ephod and Choshen – two articles that would have the names of the tribes inscribed on them l'zikaron, for a remembrance. They would be the ones to contribute the stones on behalf of the tribes which they represented. The Midrash observes that the spelling of the word Nesiim lacks two yuds. The defective spelling implies a subtle rebuke of the Nesiim for being lax in not bringing their gifts when everyone else had contributed. They assumed that the tally of the nation's contribution would come up short, allowing for them to contribute the shortfall. Apparently, they erred, and, as a result, their laxity was considered indolent, leading to the missing two yuds in their name. According to Chizkuni, however, this was their plan from the very beginning: they wanted to contribute the precious stones.

Horav Moshe Tzvi Neriya, zl, understands their failing differently. He feels that the Nesiim underestimated the Jewish People, not realizing that their zeal and passion were intrinsic to the Mishkan experience, and were so great that they would not waste a moment in contributing whatever was needed. The Nesiim were unaware of the potential of the Jew. Rav Neriya compares this to an unintelligent farmer whose appreciation of the excellent quality and fertile nature of his land is nonexistent. Thus, rather than sow high quality produce, he wastes his land by sowing food for animals.

A nasi is one who elevates. Nesiim is derived from the word naso, to raise up. The function of a leader is to elevate those who are in his charge. A Nasi leads, elevates, encourages, reveals potential – both physical and spiritual. A Nasi brings out the best in his tribe. In order to bring out the best, one must be acutely aware of each and every member's potential. To write someone off -- or bunch him together with others -- is to demean his potential.

Wherein lay the error in judgment of the Nesiim? Perhaps their issue was in regard to the people's sincerity in giving. They had just committed an egregious sin in which they gave gold in order to create a replacement for Moshe Rabbeinu. The sin of the Golden Calf was fresh on their minds; certainly, an opportunity to atone for their sin with the creation of the Mishkan would go a long way in assuaging their guilt. Veritably, they had no problem giving, but why were they giving? Was it out of guilt or remorse – an attempt to feel good? When it involves guilt, each person has the opportunity to rationalize. Some might feel remorseful, while others might feel justified in their actions. They might not feel that they “owe” as much as others who had greater participation. The nesiim kept all of this in mind and decided that the people were so fractious in their feelings of guilt that they would come up short. So they decided to wait, to make up the short fall. They were wrong, because they had misjudged the people. These were good people who had erred, and when the opportunity for atonement emerged, they took the initiative. A leader must know the

potential of each and every one of his charges and endeavor to elevate it to its maximum.